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THE

WAYS OF WISDOM

AND

OTHER SERMONS

BY

WM. R. RICHARDS

Crescent Avenue Church, Plainfield, New Jersey

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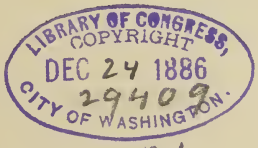

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THESE few sermons have been printed in compliance with a request from friends whose wish I cannot disregard. Knowing that such discourses must depend for their chief interest on the circumstances of original delivery, I have retained so far as might be their original form.

The selection I have tried to make fairly representative of our usual services on the Lord's Day. Let me hope that the topics of Christian Giving and Biblical Study deserve to be so regarded; and more especially all that concerns the sacrifice and gracious example of our Lord.

Between Solomon and the beloved disciple, the beginning of wisdom and the ripe maturity of faith, perhaps each may find his portion of meat in due season.

PLAINFIELD, *November*, 1886.

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I.

THE WAYS OF WISDOM.*

"*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*"—PROV. iii. 17.

TO-DAY is observed in many of our churches as children's day. This does not mean that all of us who are old enough to vote must stay at home: or that we must sit on one side as mere spectators, and let the younger ones do the worshipping. But it means that we all come together to-day for a children's service, remembering that we ourselves have been children, even the oldest of us; and that a good deal of the child sticks to us still. In college, at commencement time, when graduates of all ages were apt to come back for a day or two to visit their alma mater, we often noticed that the oldest classes, men who had been out of college thirty, forty, fifty years, seemed to take the heartiest pleasure of all in making themselves boys again: those gray-haired dignitaries of the Church and the State would march through the college grounds, singing their student songs at the top of their voices, not at all afraid of compro-

* Preached on Children's Day, June 13, 1886.

mising their manhood by this renewal of the customs of their youth. And so it is no compromise of dignity for any of us to come to this children's service as participants; to place ourselves, as well as we can, beside our young fellow-students in the great school of life—these small freshmen and juniors; to share their hopes and their curiosity and ambition; or if there should be any one here too old for such condescension, any one who cannot be converted and become as a little child at least once or twice in the year, he may as well go out of the church at once; for we are told that with such a temper of heart he can by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven.

So then, children, all of you, I ask you if you do not like the sound of our text; and if we have not got an interesting sort of teacher to speak to us today, this Solomon. He does not look much like a minister, to be sure; but he looks as if he had been everywhere that any one can go, and had seen pretty much everything that there is to see; and that is the sort of man we are glad to listen to. For now that we are all boys and girls here together, we may confess that we do not always care much to listen to these ministers. We do not always take much stock, as the saying is, in what they tell us. They do not know as much as they try to make us think. They spend their time in their study, reading old books, and writing over old sermons, and in talking to sick

people and old ladies; what do they know about the world, and the ways to make money and to have a good time? They advise us not to smoke and swear, and always to be good; and go to the prayer-meeting, and not to go to the theatre, and all that sort of thing: and of course we expect them to talk that way; they can't go to such pleasant places themselves; and of course they do not wish any one else to go. But what do they know about it, anyway? This John the Baptist, who has lived all his life till a fortnight ago in the country, where he never saw more than five or six people at a time; or this Elijah, who chooses to wander off by himself, and live like a hermit on the hills and beside the brook;—these preachers, all of them;—they mean well, no doubt, but we think they are a little slow; they do not know what they are trying to talk about. So we listen to them as long as we can stay awake on Sunday; and then go and do just as we choose on Monday.

But, children, we have a different sort of preacher to-day, this Solomon: why, he is as rich as Crœsus; and you ought to see his horses and the handsome houses he has built for himself. And he knows all the big people abroad; and they send presents to each other. And his wife is the daughter of the King of Egypt. And he has fleets of ships to go anywhere he sends them; and they bring him everything he wants, all sorts of strange animals and birds, apes

and peacocks, and curiosities from all over the world: he has a sort of private menagerie up at his own house. And the best music; and all the pleasantest people. I tell you that man knows what it is to have a good time: he is not one of your humdrum ministers with nothing but a black coat and a bookcase and a barrel of sermons.

We are something like boys in school, all of us, and we do not pay much attention to what our teacher says: but an older boy comes back from college, where he has made a great mark for himself, and is captain of the ball-nine, and knows all the best fellows; we will listen to every word that he says. Or we are like girls at the seminary; and one of the older girls, who has been out in society for a year or two, and has spent one winter in New York, and another abroad, and has been introduced to a live lord in London, comes back with one of her Paris dresses on; we will listen to her. Well, what has this Solomon, this older boy, to say about his good times, now that he has come back from college?

"Her ways are ways of pleasantness," he says. Why, that is good: that sounds like having a good time. But whose ways? who is he talking about? "Wisdom's ways." Oh! that is not quite what we were expecting. That sounds rather like a sermon. That is what our tiresome old teacher has been telling us for a year past: he is always saying that it is pleas-

anter to read Cæsar than to play ball; and pleasanter to draw circles and triangles on the blackboard than to ride on the bicycle. And we always thought he was mistaken. And does Solomon come back and tell us the same thing? He must be making fun of us. No: he says he is in earnest.

Well, let us find out what he means by the ways of wisdom. Ways of wisdom, roads of wisdom. The most interesting thing to know about a road, is where it goes to. There is something in that. Perhaps he means that the way of wisdom leads into more pleasure at last than any other way, even if it does not always seem such a pleasant road to start out on. Yes; and probably that is so sometimes. The other day when we were planning to ride over to New Brunswick after school, Henry and George, who made haste to learn their lessons, and who recited them well, and started off promptly, did find the ride pleasanter than Tom did, who spent the morning whispering about the time he expected to make, and the fun he was going to have, and so failed in all his lessons, and was kept in after school and missed the ride altogether; is that what you mean, Solomon, when you say that wisdom's road is one of pleasantness; do you mean that it leads into more pleasantness than other roads? "Yes," he says, "that is part of what I mean." "I have noticed in college," he goes on, "that the fellows who come well prepared for the course, and who have cultivated

some real taste for study, are the ones who have time for all the fun too, and seem to enjoy it most—the ball, the boating, the singing, the pleasant society. The fellows who go to college meaning to study, and with a good start in their studies; they really get the cream of it all." Well, if Solomon says so, we shall have to see to-morrow what we can make out of Cæsar and Geometry, shall we not? or what we can make out of our reading and writing and arithmetic. That path of hard study has always seemed a pretty rough path to walk on; but if it really leads into all these pleasant things, we do not any of us wish to be left out of those.

But hush! Solomon is beginning to speak again. He says he will tell us something about those other paths that are not paths of wisdom: for he has walked along some of them himself far enough to know where they go to. There is the path of the idle man —no, I mean the idle child; we are all children to-day—a very easy road to travel. Not to do anything unless you feel like it: not to do anything that takes too much trouble. It is too much trouble to get up in time for breakfast, and too much trouble to start from home in time for school, or in time for church on Sunday. We will come when we are ready, not before. And if we disturb five hundred people who are trying to unite in prayer, as we march up the aisle, and crowd past them into the seats, that makes no

difference to us. We are not going to hurry ourselves: it is too much trouble.

And we are not going to trouble ourselves to learn all our lessons either, just as the book says they ought to be; we shall spell our words the way we think easiest: e-s-y, easy; t-r-u-b-b-l-e, trouble; s-p-e-l, spell; h-o-o, who. And it is too much trouble to learn that long multiplication table exactly; we shall say that 4 times 7 makes 82, if we want to. Perhaps you have heard that we have a Take-it-easy club in our town; and two of us, you know, Dan and Charlie, were sitting in the yard one day whittling; and their mother called, "Boys, come in here. I want you to help me." And they said, "We can't now." And she asked, "Why not, Dan; what are you doing?" "Doing nothing." "And what are you doing, Charlie?" "Helping Dan." That is our way of living, helping each other do nothing; and it is very easy and pleasant. Do you not think so, Solomon?

"It is a hard way, boys, before you get through," he says. "I went by the field of the slothful: and it was all grown over with thorns and nettles: and the stone-wall was broken down: and I looked at it a while, and took a lesson from it. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as a robber: and thy want as an armed man. It takes a

great deal more trouble for the idle man to barely live off his neglected farm than it does for the industrious man to live in plenty off his farm, with its rich, well-kept acres, and its walls always in good repair. The idle man always finds the hardest ways of doing things. It is harder work to come to church a little late, and walk up to your pew with all the people staring at you, and find it full, and have to hunt for another, than it would have been to start ten minutes earlier, and be ready to take part in the service at the beginning."

Why, so our minister used to tell us, and we did not pay much attention: but if you say so, Solomon, we really must see what we can do about it. If this road of slothfulness ends in thorns and nettles and hardship, as you say, we shall have to choose some other route.

But are there any other bad roads? "Ah, yes," he says, "plenty of them. Did you see those five or six young men walking into a pleasant-looking shop down-town with such curious doors; made to open easily, but to hide whatever is going on inside?" Yes, we saw them; and they seemed to be having a very pleasant time: they were talking and laughing in a loud tone: and we can hear them now inside there laughing louder yet: they seem too happy to contain themselves; and very good friends they are with each other. And sometimes they have tried to

make us go in with them. And they have called us babies and fools because we did not know how to enjoy ourselves. How is it, Solomon? You have been to college: is that the way to enjoy yourself—to go off every now and then on a spree? Do these boys and men who drink have a pleasanter time than the rest of us?

"They think so, for a little while," he says: "but before long they find they are mistaken. They have only woe, and sorrow, and quarrelling among themselves, and cursing at each other; and wounds without cause that they have given each other, and redness of eyes. If you want my advice, it is this: 'Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly: at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder.' And—hear me out: wine is not the only thing to look away from; if I were making a new edition of my Proverbs to-day, I should tell some of you, children, not to look upon the candy when it is sweet, and tempting, and when it goeth down smoothly. At the last it biteth like a toothache and stingeth like a dyspepsia: and when you have thoroughly sickened yourself with it, you will wish that you had never heard of the miserable stuff; you will wish that you had been wise enough to eat wholesome food; and eat it at the right time; and had kept your health and strength; and your

ability to enjoy all the good gifts of God. And—do not interrupt me, I am not through yet; I should say to some of you young boys, whom I saw coming out of school the other day, trying to light your cigarettes and keep them lighted, and finding it pretty hard work, and trying to make it seem that you were forty or fifty years old—I should say that we had a good many curious things in Jerusalem when I was king there—a regular museum of them: but we had not anything quite so curious as this, this small roll of paper with a little fire on one end and a fool on the other. That would have taken the prize away from all the apes and peacocks and other curiosities that I got together out of Spain and India. Why, boys, you must know that you are fools to do such a thing. Perhaps you ask me not to call your father names who does the same: but your father is a grown man at least, and may not have come to this children's meeting; or if he has, I am sure that he would back every statement that I make. We are not talking now about his style of smoking; I am not calling him names, for I venture to say he does not smoke these miserable, poisonous cigarettes. But for us, children and young people, to take up a habit wilfully that we have no natural inclination for; that at first is sickening to most of us; that will surely stunt our growth, and stupefy our minds, and poison our whole vitality, merely be-

cause we think it makes us seem big—— You just go home, and open your Bible at my Proverbs: the 23d chapter: and put in these foot-notes: 'Look not upon the wine when it is red; no: nor upon the cheap confectionery when it is sweet; nor upon the tobacco-smoke when it is disagreeable and poisonous and silly.' So much for that broad pathway of intemperance: it does not lead into pleasantness or peace. Far from it."

Well, Solomon; you are using rather plain language. Have you anything more to say? Are there any other bad roads?

"Oh, yes," he answers: "I cannot take time even to name most of them, for you are only children, and could not listen to me for an hour or two as grown people would without grumbling. But I must speak a little longer even to you. There are roads which I hope most of you are too young to know much about. But perhaps you know something of them; perhaps some of your friends have taught you words, that you would not have your mother hear for the world. And perhaps they have shown you books and pictures, that you knew you ought to be ashamed to touch or look at. But you were tempted to touch, and look, and listen. Oh, do we not all wish sometimes, children, that we had a clean heart again; with nothing but pure thoughts in it, and nothing but pure words coming out of it: so that we could open it, if

we were asked to, and let any one—let our father and mother see everything that was there, and know that they would not find anything to make us ashamed? But then we forget this wish so quickly: and the next time we are tempted, we listen and speak again, and make ourselves all the more impure. And we even find some kind of evil pleasure in what we are so ashamed of. It is as if some one with a very soft inviting voice, and a very pleasant face, were saying to us: 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' O, what a lie that is!" Solomon exclaims. "And listen to this: whenever you are tempted to do, or say, or hear, or see, anything that you know you ought to be ashamed of, remember I tell you; 'Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell.' 'There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, seemeth pleasant, but the end thereof are the ways of death.'"

And so it is with all those ways of foolishness and wickedness: they often seem easy and pleasant to travel at first, but they lead quickly into trouble and want, and shame, and darkness. Now a road ought to be named from the place it goes to: and so I say the ways of wisdom are pleasantness; and her paths are peace. It is not always an easy road to start in, or to walk in: it is often up-hill work; there is no doubt about it—but it leads into a pleasant country. And even the path itself grows pleasanter and pleasanter,

the further it leads you into that pleasant country. Why, many a boy has begun to study, only because he wants to know something, and he finds the study itself very disagreeable work. But as he goes on, a time comes when the hours that he spends over his books are the very pleasantest hours of the whole day to him. A boy resists those temptations to smoking, and eating, and drinking what is not good for him: or breaks off the foolish habit, if he had begun to form it: and it is pretty hard work: and for a while only strong resolution carries him through. But a day comes when he takes more pleasure a thousand times in his health, and strength, and habits of self-control, than he ever would have taken in the pleasantest sinful excess. "Wisdom's ways," "the path of the just," Solomon says, "may not always promise much pleasure to begin with; but it is as the shining light: that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Wisdom's ways. But what is wisdom after all? Tell us that, Solomon; you have been telling us about a good many kinds of foolishness: tell us what is wisdom. Is it to work hard and keep your farm in good order; and raise big crops: and save your money and grow rich? "No," Solomon says, "not always: a man can do all that without being a wise man: for I myself got more servants, and herds, and flocks than any one before me ever had in Jerusalem:

but I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought: and all was vanity and a striving after wind."

Well, what is wisdom? is it to study hard at school, and learn all that there is to know in our books: so that people will point us out as the very best scholars? "No," Solomon says: "not always: a boy may do all that, and not be truly wise. For I tried to search out all things under the sun: and men called me the wise king: my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge: but it was all a striving after wind. My increase of knowledge was an increase of sorrow."

"Well, but what is wisdom, this kind of wisdom whose ways are pleasantness and peace; can you tell us?" "Yes," he says: "I can, or at least I can begin to tell you. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.'"

Solomon says that, children: and before he made up his mind to that, he had tried pretty nearly every path that you could think of: some paths that men would call foolish, and some that men would call wise: but he had to come back discouraged from all of them, to take a new start here: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Well, that is a pretty good sermon at last; and if he can make us believe that, I am glad we have let

Solomon have the pulpit this morning: though, certainly, he has not always talked much like a minister. Once or twice I was afraid he would say something that might sound a little strange in church. He called a spade a spade; and most preachers call it an implement of agriculture. But now, before he gets through, it seems that he had not forgotten what place this is, and what day this is: for he says: "This is the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

But now, children, before we go away, I must ask Solomon to make room for another teacher, wiser than he ever was. For this building that we gather in is a better temple of worship than Solomon ever saw: and this Bible of ours has in it some books better than any that Solomon had ever read. He was a wise man: and "the Queen of the South came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear his wisdom: but, behold a greater than Solomon is here." We have been trying to make Solomon tell us what is the way, the way of wisdom, the way of pleasantness and peace. And the most that he can do is to say a very few words about the beginning of it. You see, poor man, he could talk all day about the ways of folly, of slothfulness, and intemperance, and impurity; because he had walked along some of those

roads himself for many years, and knew where they went. But the way of wisdom, he never much more than looked into that; and, so all that he can say is: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of it."

Well, it is something to know as much as that—to know how the way of wisdom begins: but we should really like to know a little about how it goes on; and what this pleasantness and peace that it leads to are like. How shall we learn? Who can tell us? These wise men of worldly experience, like Solomon, can always tell us more about the ways of folly than they can about the way of wisdom. What is the way? Children, I thank God that some of you, young as you are, know what it is. You remember that Jesus was talking with His disciples just before He left the earth; and He said to them: "Ye know the way whither I am going." And Thomas answered with just the same sorrowful perplexity that has troubled many of us since: "How can we know the way?" And Jesus said: "I am the way."

That is a better answer than Solomon knew how to give; he could warn us against those dangerous paths of idleness and folly and sin; but how are we to keep out of them? how are we to get out of them? they open before us so pleasantly, so deceitfully. And we often start into them without thinking of the danger. And then when we have come to grief and shame, and really wish to turn back, we do not know which way

to turn. And then Jesus speaks to us; and He is greater than Solomon; and He says: "I am the way. Give your heart to me; bring your troubles and sins to me in prayer; tell me about your failures and blunders, and all the things that have made you sorry and ashamed; ask me to lead you the right way, and I will." I thank God, children, that some of us know this to be true. I wish we all knew it. It is something that the youngest of us are not too young to learn, for He says: "Suffer the little ones to come unto me." It is something that the oldest of us, even if we have many gray hairs on our head, are not too old to learn. For we are all here to-day at a children's service. We have wished that God would convert us all, and make us as little children, so that we might find the way into the kingdom of heaven.

II.

CHRISTIAN GIVING AS A MATTER OF BUSINESS.*

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse."—MAL. iii. 10.

WHAT has that old law of tithes for us Christians?

I. First, what was that law? We learn from many sources that in very ancient times the tenth was a common form of tribute, whether for secular or sacred purposes; when Abraham gave a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek, he acted after the common custom of the day. Abraham's grandson, Jacob, being familiar with this custom, on awaking from that dream in which God had promised him safety and abundance, vowed that if the promise were fulfilled, he would devote a tenth of his yearly income to the Lord. This vow might well be recognized as binding upon all the children of Jacob, who had hope in the promises spoken to their father: accordingly, under Moses, the system of tithes or tenths became incorporated in their law. The tenth of all agricultural

* Delivered before the regular offering for the Board of Home Missions, Nov. 15, 1885.

produce was devoted to God. Indeed, the common opinion of Bible scholars has been that there were at least two tithes. The statutes on the subject are not quite clear; but comparing what is said in Numbers (xviii. 21-28), with what is said in Deut. (xii. 5–18, xiv. 22–27, xxvi. 12–14), we conclude that one tenth was demanded for the support of the Levites, and another tenth for the festivals and relief of the poor. The latter, however, was quite largely consumed by the offerer himself and his poorer friends in their own attendance upon the festival; and therefore may hardly be regarded as a tax. But the first tithe, that demanded for the support of the Levites in their sacred ministry, was a direct offering of one tenth to the Lord. This, like all the appointed Jewish offerings, was intended to denote, that the whole people, with their land and all their possessions, belonged to God; the part surrendered to Him a confession that the whole was His.

Now, the statutes of the Jewish law did not all possess equal permanent value. Some of them express eternal principles always binding the servant of God; while others were of temporary application. We are not very curious to know to-day what particular kind of beasts the Hebrews must call clean and what unclean; but when their law says: "Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; honor thy father and thy mother"—there, we say, is a law for us.

Now, the Old Testament itself furnishes one means of judging which of its own statutes were the more important and permanent; and that is the words of the prophets. You may have noticed that the prophets very generally ignore the law of Moses, basing their own instructions rather on the eternal and universally recognized principles of righteousness. Sometimes (Is. i. 10—, lviii. 5), speaking almost in contempt of the ceremonial fasts and sacrifices, and other Mosaic appointments, which might be scrupulously observed by one who had no true religion in his heart. But sometimes those prophets adopt a very different tone. Two, at least, of the ancient ceremonies are treated with the greatest reverence, as if they were seen to embody some eternal principle of true religion. One was the Sabba h, the consecration to God's honor and service of a special portion of that time which is all His: the other, in our text, is the tithe, the consecration to God's honor and service of a special portion of that wealth which is all His. "Will a man rob God?" Malachi exclaims; "but ye have robbed me; wherein? in tithes and offerings."

From the Old Testament itself, then, we are justified in supposing that the tithe, like the Sabbath, may be something more than a mere temporary ceremony.

II. But what has the New Testament to teach on

the subject? At first thought we should answer, "Nothing." The word itself is seldom used, and even then with unfavorable associations. It is Pharisees who tithe mint, anise, and cummin, neglecting the weightier matters of the law. And neither by this word nor by any other is the command laid upon Christians to pay any particular proportion of their means into the Lord's treasury. According to the New Testament, the tithe, the demand of just one-tenth from all, does not hold in the Christian Church. That fact, I think, ought to be clearly stated, for it has to do with the essential character of Christianity. Christianity is not a series of detailed rules which may be stated for the government of the church. Good men, with more zeal than wisdom, have sometimes been strongly tempted to make such rules for their brethren: what they must eat, what they must drink, what they must wear, where they must go. But, wherever that is done in any church, it is a usurpation of power which God never gave one Christian over his fellow. Christ has laid on every man the burden of deciding these questions for himself. And however we may help each other with our counsel and example, still the burden of actual decision must after all be left where God has laid it. The New Testament treats us not as little children, whose life must be so largely ordered for them even in detail, but as men and women, who being once furnished

with the principles of right living, must then take upon ourselves the responsibility, with God's help, of ordering our lives for ourselves. That, I say, as concerns all departments of conduct, has to do with the essential character of Christianity.

The Jew was told, for instance, what kinds of food he should eat, and what kinds he must leave alone—the problem of diet was all worked out for him: but the Christian is thrown back upon this deeper principle: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." He must work out the problem for himself.

So with regard to the proper proportion of offering for God's service. "One tenth," the law said to the Israelites: then their minds might rest easy, like the minds of little children, who have obeyed their parents' word. But the Gospel comes to Christians as to grown men, and says: "Let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him": "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart: not grudgingly or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." You see, the responsibility of decision is thrown back upon the Christian himself: no prophet or apostle or divine lawgiver will take it off his shoulders. He must purpose in his own heart; he must determine how much the Lord has prospered him: and what proportion therefore should be laid by in store for God's uses.

You may ask, then, do we find under the Christian dispensation anything in any way corresponding to the old institution of tithes? The Christian gifts are all freewill-offerings, are they not? Yes, Christian gifts are all of the free will: and yet, I believe, we do find the wise principle of the old tithe very clearly reproduced under the Christian dispensation. That principle is stated,—what we might call the Christian law of tithes is laid down in that passage which I have quoted from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Let me repeat it again: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come."

I wish you to notice two things about the method of giving here commended, or, I might say, commanded. First, giving should be a deliberately formed habit. The man at certain set times was to lay by in store, for this as for the other regular demands upon his income. Paul was not content to gather from the Corinthians whatever money they might happen to have in their pockets when he came: they must make thoughtful preparation for his coming; they must habitually lay by a reserve, to be ready for those demands of Christian benevolence. The other thing to be noticed about this method of giving, is, that the amount should be determined not by the urgency of each separate appeal, but by the

size of the giver's income. He was to lay by as God had prospered him. There we see clearly the old tithe principle; only the particular proportion is not now stated. Let the Christian determine what that proportion should be, one-tenth, or less, or more; but on some proportion of his income, to be rendered back to God, he must determine: so I understand Paul's rule.

I am firmly convinced, my friends, that this is the true method of giving for all of us. Let us compare it with another method—I suppose the more common method—where money is devoted for benevolence merely as special demands arise. Some day I chance to hear an appeal for some poor man, or hospital, or Mission Board; and according as the object seems more or less worthy, I am induced to give toward it more or less of the money I chance to find in my purse. Why, in the nature of things, my gifts, according to that system—or rather lack of system—cannot be very large. Sometimes for months together I shall not hear an appeal that interests me more than a few cents' worth: and when occasionally I have been deeply moved, and pull out my purse—I don't know how it is with you, my friends, but I know that my purse, unless some special precautions have been taken, is very apt, when I pull it out, to be found empty. Paul comes with his story about suffering and want at Jerusalem; and really the man

moves me very much: but there it is. I have nothing with me.

The tradesmen who supply us with coal, and food, and clothing, etc., would fare badly, if they had to content themselves with such money as chanced to be in our purses on the first of the month. They have ways of forcing us to take some thought about the matter; to lay by us in store that there be no gatherings when they come. This hap-hazard giving, then, will always be scanty giving. I think that may be affirmed without much qualification.

You may remember the pretty story of that old colored servant in the South, whose master, a Christian man, was accustomed to give in this way: saying that any other method was too much like a tax, made religion seem arbitrary and exacting. He liked to give gladly and freely of what he had when the time came. The old servant thought she would apply the same method to that evening's dinner. And when the family sat down, astonished, to a few cold scraps, where they had always found abundance, she explained that 'she had heard them say so often that giving whatever happened to be on hand when the time came was so much freer and lovinger way of serving those we love best, that she thought she'd try it.'

I presume such an object-lesson as that would open the eyes of many of us. As old Thanksgiving

Ann expressed it: "It appears that people served that way fare slim." And I suspect the Lord's cause has fared slim, not so much because His people have stubbornly closed their ears when actual appeals were made to them, as because they have not formed the habit of laying by in store a sum sufficient to meet those appeals whenever they should be made. The scantiness of the gifts; that is one objection.

But I have another grave objection to that hap-hazard way of giving. It so prolongs and intensifies the pain of giving. I suppose there is always a kind of pain in depriving ourselves of some good thing that we might have kept. Even the gift you offer to one you love dearly, and which fills your own heart with generous delight, costs you something; else it is no gift of yours; and that cost means pain. Indeed, that pain, that personal sacrifice, is needed even for your own joy in the giving. It is a sort of bitter appetizer, coming before the feast of benevolence. But there is such a thing, my friends, as making a whole meal of the bitterness, and losing all the feast. A man making a present to his friend may so continue to brood over the cost of it, that the deep pleasure of giving can find no room in his heart. And so, if I leave my offerings to the Lord to be drawn out of me by the earnest appeals of needy men and needy institutions, why, it is a most distressing process; a sort of perpetual amputation of a very sensitive limb.

I am distinctly conscious of the pain with every dollar that is extracted from my unwilling fingers. And so I never get time to think of anything else. The joy of benevolence! the feast of liberality! Why, I have been allowed no chance to recover from this smart of privation.

Then, too, I am always more than half persuaded that this particular beggar has made a fool of me; I strongly suspect that the man did not need the money so much as I myself; and it seems to me that for every dollar I send to the heathen, I must pay five dollars to get it to them; and so of all my gifts. And these various suspicions keep the old wound open, so that my offerings, small as they may seem to others, are like a constant laceration of my own flesh.

We take up a good many contributions in this church; and it is partly out of compassion for you, my friends, that I urge you to have the pain of it over with once for all. The pain of an amputation, I fancy, does not depend so much on the amount of limb taken off as on the amount of cutting. All of us who have a keen sense of the value of money, know that it hurts as much or more to count out ten shining dollars, one by one, as to draw a check for a hundred. Now, I say, let us have the pain connected with this process over with as quickly as possible, that then we may enjoy full leisure for the

luxury of Christian giving—this finest, rarest pleasure of the Christian life. Suppose one of you, who have thought these incessant appeals for charity a great nuisance, determine for once to try Paul's recommendation: reckon up your probable income—or "how the Lord is prospering you," to use his old-fashioned phrase—and then determine upon some proportion of it—what proportion it is for you to say—some fixed proportion, to be set apart for God's uses. Well, the thing is done, and it was not very hard to do after all. The sum is larger than you ever dropped in the box before; but now that you are thinking of what the Lord has done for you, and asking what you shall offer back to Him, the sum seems pitifully small. Indeed, you hardly have the face to mention it to Him. However, the sum has been fixed upon: to be provided for now through the year, just like your other obligations. And then the question is, how to use it? You have this fund on hand, or subject to your order: what shall you give it to? And you now find yourself impatient for those appeals which once seemed so tiresome. You can weigh them against each other, and see how to divide up your small fortune to best advantage. There is no more sense of privation in this distribution than if you were running your eye down a list of securities to choose the best for your own investments.

You will make some mistakes, no doubt, in the selec-

tion; not every stock goes up for the investor, or even holds its own. And so not all of your gifts will help relieve a genuine need; but you have now become strangely philosophical under such disappointment. For you are investing this money for God; and He holds you responsible only for selecting, as well as you can, the safest investments. He will stand all the losses.

Just dwell for a moment on that view of the case. We had been excusing ourselves pretty generally from giving at all, since we found such grave objection against almost every cause presented. And there are grave objections. I should be puzzled to name a single charitable organization, or Board of our Church, with whose management I am altogether satisfied. Sometimes I am greatly dissatisfied; but what shall I do? Here I am with a sum of the Lord's money that must be disposed of, and I am persuaded that the worst of these Boards can distribute much of this money to better advantage than I could by myself alone: so I make choice among them as best I may, and find in the end that, with here and there a partial failure, the investments have turned out pretty well after all. I suppose that servant who straightway traded with his lord's talents may, here and there, have fallen into some unprofitable venture; but he fared much better in the end than the servant who would not trade at all, nor even risk an investment with the bankers; but, because of

suspicions and fears, went and hid his lord's money in the earth.

On the whole, then, this giving, when you already have on hand the sum of money that has to be given, proves a very delightful and interesting process. That painful sense of privation was done with at the outset, when you first set this sum apart: and ever since you have been free to enjoy the noble pleasures of liberality.

Another fact I am sure some will notice. Your fund goes further than you had anticipated. At least if you begin the year by giving to the various objects of benevolence only about the same amount that you had been accustomed to give by the former method, it will soon come to light that not much inroad is .de on the fund. Ah, my friends, this proportion of our income seemed very small when compared with God's rich mercies to us; while those previous unsystematic gifts of ours had seemed very large, measured by the pain of giving them; but I think many a Christian, on reducing his charities to order, has been confounded and humiliated to learn how far short those formidable gifts had always fallen even of this small percentage of what God had been giving him. We had almost supposed that we were offering in one way and another the larger part of our means back to the Lord: and now this petty tenth, or whatever it may be, leaves for all our ac-

customed charities a veritable embarrassment of riches.

Well, but what shall the proportion be? No divine law solves that problem for us: by what principle of mathematics shall we solve it for ourselves? I cannot answer for you. "Every man as he purposeth in his heart." But you remember the basis of the calculation, "as the Lord hath prospered you." Your subject of thought, when you begin to calculate, must be, what has the Lord done for me? For remember, you are offering this proportion back to the Lord, not to James, or John, or Paul, or whatever the name may be of each man that asks your gifts. What has the Lord done for you? Pray, do not suppose your answer finished when you have counted up merely the dollars He has given you. Has He not given more, even His own life, for your ransom? What proportion of your means shall you devote? One young man came running to Jesus with substantially that question, and the Lord answered: "One hundred per cent.: sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and come and follow me."

I do not know what answer the Lord may give to each member of this congregation: but I do know that He is the one to give the answer: that thinking of His ransom paid for us, we are to ask Him what He would have us offer to Him; and then scrupulously set that part aside. And it does seem to me

that with our own richer advantages, any Christian must doubt whether he has heard the Lord's answer correctly until he finds himself authorized to offer at least the tenth, the proportion of those poor, half-enlightened Jews. It does seem, does it not, as if, in many cases at least, that might be taken as a sort of a starting-point from which, as the Lord increases our means, our charities also should grow.

Now and then, we are shown by some striking example, that this tenth must never be taken as the extreme limit of Christian benevolence. Our Lord would have us remember through all time that poor widow who cast her living into the treasury. And she has had not a few imitators. I was grieved to learn last spring of the sudden death of a backwoodsman, a guide, whom I had just engaged for an excursion in the woods, and who had served our party faithfully before. I learned afterward of a memorandum of expenses for the previous year found in that guide's pocket. He was a man of broken constitution, likely at any time to be laid aside. His income had been $200. One might have thought that, with so little for his own necessity, he would have felt himself excluded from the privilege of giving at all. His income, I say, was $200. Out of it he had given to the Lord $117. The memorandum was intended only for his own eye. I hope none in this congregation with any income at all, or able to earn any in-

come at all, will feel himself or herself excluded from the privilege of setting apart deliberately and cheerfully some definite proportion of it for the Lord's service. Why, for the last century and a half, Christians in all our churches have been singing devoutly, as we have sung to-day:

> "Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were a present far too small."

And all this time we have possessed our fair share of this realm of nature; suppose we had even been content to make so small a present as the tithe—suppose one-tenth of all Christian incomes to-day were offered to the Lord: truly it would seem an insignificant gift in comparison with that complete surrender spoken of in our song—but how it would fill to overflowing the depleted treasuries of all our Boards and charitable organizations the world over! What a good thing it would be for us as members of this congregation, if our share of that offering could be made in full. Some of you, I know, do make it now. Some, I hope, give more than that proportion:—if all might give it! If in just this one matter of thoughtful, prayerful setting apart, out of our means, for the Lord's work, He had no item of charge against any one of us,—why, really, I would then almost take it upon me to speak as prophet, and promise you in God's name rich blessings from on high. At least I can

take as my own the words of this ancient prophet; and in view of the coming new-year, with its balancing of accounts, and its new plans and purposes, I can beg you all to make also this purpose and then adhere to it, as God may prosper you, with true business-like fidelity. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

III.

CHRISTIAN GIVING AS A LUXURY.*

> "*And afterward offered the continual burnt-offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill-offering unto the Lord.*"—EZRA iii. 5.

THE contributions made to the service of the Lord by the ancient Hebrews were of various kinds. There were, first, the tithes, what we should call a ten per cent. income tax, given for the support of the Levites, and for some other purposes, with the similar contribution of first-fruits. Then there were the sacrifices at the altar, including three principal varieties. The sin-offering, appointed as a means of expiation for different kinds of offences—the prominent feature being the pouring of the blood of the victim upon the altar. The burnt-offering, signifying consecration, as if the offerer would have ascended in his own person, like the smoke of the sacrifice, toward God. And lastly, the peace-offering, which was chiefly a feast of thanksgiving, eaten before the Lord at the

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* Delivered before the special offering for the debt of the Board of Home Missions, July 12, 1885.

gate of the tabernacle. Now, of these four principal Jewish contributions, the second and third have no close resemblance to anything in our Christian ceremonies. We bring no sin-offering to the sanctuary; for the Lord Jesus has given Himself for us once for all, the just for the unjust; and "by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." The burnt-offering of consecration, on the other hand, is something which ought to find its counterpart in the entire life of every Christian, and therefore cannot well be restricted to any particular symbol. Therefore, out of the four kinds of contributions we have remaining only the first and the fourth to correspond with some part of our present Christian duty. As to the first, we have other opportunities for asking the question, what authority that old law of tithes has for us, or what lesson it may teach us.

But our lesson to-day will be drawn from the fourth kind of Jewish contributions, the peace-offering. As I have said, this was in general a feast of thanksgiving, which the man offered, and of which he himself partook before the Lord. We might properly call it the Jewish Eucharist. One variety of it went by the special name of thank-offering. But under all circumstances the peace-offering was distinguished by one special peculiarity, and it is this that I present for your special notice now. It was voluntary: either the fulfilment of a vow which one had voluntarily

made, or the carrying out of some present impulse of gratitude. As we read in our text, "of every one that willingly offered a freewill-offering unto the Lord"; that name gives the essential idea, "a freewill-offering."

Now, it might be said that all Christian contributions are freewill-offerings. Whatever that old law of tithes may still have for us to-day, the New Testament writers studiously refrain from placing it upon us as a law. Paul has stated expressly the Gospel law of giving: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." All this might be said, and would be true, I believe. Yet may it not be well that we should still keep before our minds this distinction of tithes and freewill-offerings, which God placed before His ancient people? Suppose a man should regularly and conscientiously set apart a portion of his income for charitable purposes: whether a tenth, or more, or less; that proportion, which according to his best judgment, God expects him to give: should make calculation for this in advance, as he would for any other of the regular demands upon his income: and then apply the sum through the year in the ways that seem best to him. There we should have the Christian form of a tithe. It has become for him a simple matter of duty to give this amount, or this proportion, year

by year: just as he would pay his yearly tax; or the rent of his house; or the interest on a debt. Quite a commonplace proceeding after a while.

Now, may not this man, in addition to such habitual offering, be glad to find opportunity for some spontaneous gifts to the Lord; something free even from the compulsion of habit, or of previous resolution? It is true that his tithe was freely offered: no constraint has wrung it from him. Still, the giving of that proportion has now come to be, in his own mind at least, a matter of duty, of habit, brought under this constraint of conscience, if no other. And may not God be willing to allow him, in addition to this, the luxury of spontaneous, impulsive benevolence?

Kindly impulse is a poor substitute for good habit. But what a noble thing human character may become when the solid structure of good habit is beautified on every side with the adornment of kindly impulse!

We find it so in the relations of home and friendship. There are certain forms of courtesy and respect which my friend must render me, if he is to remain my friend. No formal law exacts them, it is true: but they are rendered back and forth between us, as matter of recognized custom: and any neglect becomes an offence. But I shall love my friend much better if, in addition to those habitual courtesies, which might almost be reckoned up for years ahead,

our friendship blossoms into all sorts of unplanned and unexpected acts of tenderness and good-will.

If I must take my choice between them, let me have from him the habitual courtesy rather than the whimsical extravagance of affection to-day, followed by rude neglect to-morrow. But that need not be the alternative: I should like best that my friend be always habitually courteous toward me; and sometimes overflowing with impulsive good-will.

So with the kind offices rendered in our homes: here is a son, we will say, and dependent upon him an aged, helpless father. Now, there are certain forms of provision for that father's comfort, which rest as a duty upon the son. According to his ability, he should devote so much time, and so much money to the happiness of the aged man. Nothing can excuse him for neglecting this custom of filial obedience. No occasional outbursts of affection could atone for habitual neglect. And yet, does not the father look for something besides that customary methodical respect and care? Is he not specially gladdened by unlooked-for words of affection, and deeds of kindness; which seem to prove that the current of his son's love, always filling its appointed channel, must now and then overflow the banks, a veritable flood of good-will? Does not the son, moreover, prize the opportunity of showing sometimes such wilful extravagance of love?

Now, I believe that our Father in heaven leaves room for such spontaneous overflowings in our obedience to Him. You may say that here it is presumptuous to talk of overflowing, since from the outset we owe Him all. And very true this is. But in many ways, my friends, He refrains from exacting the all that we owe.

In the matter of time, for instance. Our time is all the Lord's; it is all holy. What hour, or minute, or second may we rightly withhold from His service? And yet He is pleased to claim only a certain portion of this time for His own special uses; one day out of the seven, the Lord's day; set apart for His worship, for publicly honoring His name, and doing His work. The devotion of that part of the time to Him rests upon us with a sort of compulsion. For, however we may understand the authority of the fourth Commandment over Christians, we do all recognize it as part of our Christian duty in some way to keep the Lord's day holy; regarding it as in a peculiar sense the Lord's. The other days are His also, but those He has given to us for our work and our play; this day He has reserved. But do we not as Christians find it a privilege, of our own free will, to set apart other portions of time for God's public service, which He has not in any such way exacted from us?—hours taken voluntarily from the busy week for united prayer and for Christian effort?

That man denies himself a great luxury who withholds all these spontaneously holy hours, and keeps his worship rigidly within just that proportion of one day in seven, which God Himself has claimed.

And so with our own personal employment of the hours of each separate day. Every Christian, I should hope, cultivates the habit of secret prayer at special times; in the morning, perhaps, when he may ask God's help for the duties of the day; and at evening, when he may thank God for the help rendered, and ask His protection through the night. I think there can hardly be a healthy spiritual growth without such fixed habits of secret communion with God. But, my friends, how poorly that man has understood his Christian privilege who never stretches himself beyond these habits of secret prayer; whose heart never overflows with thankfulness except according to rule; who never lifts his thoughts Godward at unaccustomed times and places! No, no; the habit, the appointed rule is, indeed, a necessity of Christian living; but the luxury of Christian living is found, how much of it, in these spontaneous outbursts and overflowings of devotion!

Now, has not God allowed His servants a similar commingling of fixed habit and changing impulse in the employment of their property? Among the Jews we found the appointed law of tithes; a habit of giving to God's service, which should have become

to every obedient Israelite as much a matter of course as his daily food and drink—the tenth of his income, just as much as the seventh of his time, devoted to the Lord. But that was not all. God would also encourage among His people a cheerful and voluntary service; therefore we found also this institution of the peace-offering—this beautiful and appropriate ceremony by which every man, whose own heart prompted him to give, might rejoice in a free-will contribution to the Lord.

And I believe that God continues for us, in other forms, the same duties and privileges. Every Christian, I am sure, should practice that regular laying by for Christian benevolence as God hath prospered him—some proportion of his means, which he shall call holy, just as he calls one day in seven holy, and with the same fixed habit of devotion. That should become in his eye a regular duty, a thing of custom. But such custom, you may say, dulls the sense of luxury in giving, reduces what should be a matter of loving impulse to a matter of unconscious habit. Be it so; then God allows and encourages us to practice additional liberality in all sorts of unexpected ways and times, that through this infinite variety of the gifts we may never be sated with the luxury of giving.

The freewill-offering—the thank-offering. When God has conferred some unexpected blessing upon us, is it not the natural impulse of Christian gratitude

to make some unplanned offering to Him? When we have been restored from sickness, or delivered from danger, or brought home safe from a journey: or when similar blessings have been bestowed on those dear to us: or the still richer spiritual gifts: when we have known our sins forgiven; when some tormenting doubt has been dispelled; when we have been aided in the hour of temptation, or lifted up after we had fallen;—when our prayers for children and friends are answered, and they are brought with us to taste that the Lord is gracious—at such times of special receiving, do we not violence to our own natures if we seek not out some opportunity for special giving? Our customary tithes have been paid, of course; but this thirsty gratitude of ours would still refresh itself with some larger draught, with the abundance of a freewill-offering to the Lord.

And does He not in His kind providence furnish room for such overflow? What varied and ever-changing opportunity He offers through the changing needs of His cause, the changing needs of men, for this overflow of His people's liberality.

I once knew a good man who gave liberally to the charities of the church: always setting apart at the beginning of the year, out of his anticipated income, a large sum, the largest given by any one in that church, for the Lord's service. But not a single year passed, I think, that he did not come to me at the

end of it with a large additional gift; for the Lord had prospered him above his expectations, and here was his thank-offering. And I can assure you that the Lord never failed to show us some appropriate use for the sacrifice. I cannot but believe, my friends, that if more of us should set apart our tithes at the beginning of the year, more of us would have occasion to bring thank-offerings at the end of it.

I am not here to-day to name to each of you some special cause for a freewill-offering. From the nature of the case, each of you must do that for himself, or for herself. It must be the free will. But I am here to point out one very favorable opportunity for using such gifts as your hearts prompt you to bring. An extraordinary case of need is presented to us: a need that can be properly met only by some extraordinary liberality on the part of the churches.

I will state as clearly as I can what this need is; how it has arisen; the danger which it involves; and how it has been proposed to supply the need. Our Board of Home Missions reported to the last General Assembly a debt of over $110,000. In addition to this the Board is responsible for a debt incurred for school and chapel work by the Woman's Executive Committee. . . . . [A statement was made here of the heavy debt resting on the Board of Home Missions, its origin, and the methods proposed by the General Assembly for meeting it.] . . . .

It is in response to these requests from the General Assembly, that our session has appointed the special offering that we are now about to take. I call your attention particularly to the fact that whatever is given to-day must not be subtracted from what we should give in our regular offering for Home Missions next November. Our tithes, in other words, are appropriated in advance. We have no right to draw on them to-day. Therefore it is that I have opened before you the privilege of a thank-offering, a freewill-offering. Has not the Lord startled many of us with unlooked-for blessings, through these past months, delivering us from evil, making our cup run over with good, forgiving our iniquities, healing our diseases, redeeming our life from destruction, crowning us with loving-kindness and tender mercies? Some of us have come for the first time—and others have brought children and friends for the first time to this table of the Lord, this table of blessing. Surely our hearts must have often swelled with impulses of grateful affection. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?"—that has been our cry. The orderly interchange of gifts between us has been broken through. He has surprised us with His mercies; we would surprise Him with some offering of our love. Well, I have shown you the opportunity. God in His providence has set before us this opportunity. I will not so much as hint at the sum which we may

expect to raise, and I will not myself urge one of you to put one cent in the box. Those regular necessities of Christian benevolence will meet us some other day. To-day we are offered the luxuries of Christian benevolence: our own impulses of love may now exercise themselves without constraint. It is a voluntary sacrifice, a thank-offering; a freewill-offering to the Lord.

IV.

THE PRAYER-MEETING.

> "*What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man his own plague and his own sorrow, and shall spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear thou from heaven, Thy dwelling-place, and forgive.*"—2 CHRON. vi. 29, 30 (Rev. Version).

A PART of Solomon's prayer at the consecration of the temple. It shows one important purpose which that temple was to serve in the religious history of Israel: that of concentrating, if I may so express it, the people's prayer. They were henceforth to pray toward Jerusalem, toward the temple: thereby their faith would be strengthened, as often as they remembered the God who had hallowed that place with His own name, and who was always inviting and attending to the prayers of all His people: furthermore, their heart's desire would be directed toward the peace of Jerusalem, and the honor of Jehovah's name; thus they would be saved from selfishness or narrowness in prayer. We all remember that good man hundreds of years later, and hundreds of miles away in Babylon, that good man Daniel, who in

spite of the king's hostile decree, went into his house, and kneeled, three times a day as he had done aforetime—"and his windows in his chamber were open toward Jerusalem."

Now, in our Christian worship, neither this use of the temple, nor the temple itself, finds a place. Yet, I think we all feel the need of something corresponding to this use of the temple: something which will concentrate the prayer and faith and spiritual desire of God's people: so that each petitioner, even though he come with his own plague and his own sorrow, a burden which no brother can share with him, may yet feel that his prayer is lifted to heaven, God's dwelling-place, by the united voices of all God's people. And we have not any of us outgrown our dependence upon the helpful influence of locality. That old apostolic phrase, so closely associated with the first introduction of Christianity into Europe,—the place "where prayer was wont to be made": has deep meaning for all of us. How much every Christian owes in the upbuilding of his Christian character to that place where prayer is wont to be made. That is, in fact, what makes this Christian Sabbath so essential to vital religion: a set time when all may come to the wonted place of prayer.

But these services on a single day in the week cannot meet the whole need. The Christian values also his closet, some place where every day he habit-

ually resorts for secret prayer: and, furthermore, the craving manifests itself in many ways for help through the week from the place of public prayer. Go into a foreign cathedral at any hour: and you find there worshippers kneeling in various shrines, before various images, praying. Superstition, prayer to the saints, much of it: and yet we always wish to tread softly in passing such a silent worshipper: and we have felt a deep beauty and fitness in such a homely use for the splendid cathedral. Some Protestant churches also, in our larger cities, are kept open continually: and the invitation hanging at the door greets every tired passer, "Come in and rest and pray." And we have blessed the Christian thoughtfulness which offers that invitation, and provides for all that place of prayer.

In our Presbyterian churches, we have recognized this same need—the need of help through the week from the place of public prayer: and our response to this need has commonly taken the form of what we call the prayer-meeting. Now as always, burdened and tempted Christians, knowing every one his own plague, and his own sorrow, desire to spread forth their hands toward God's house: and for the last two or three generations, we and some other branches of the Christian Church have offered them this way of doing it. I call attention to the fact that while the need has always existed, the prayer-meeting, in the form that

we now have it, is comparatively a modern method of answering that need. For this fact justifies us in asking the question: "Does the prayer-meeting in the form familiar to us always serve its purpose? does it always and fully answer the need which has called it into existence?" I raise this question now, and wish to talk with you about it very simply and disconnectedly for a little while; partly because I have in mind some things that I wish to say: partly because there are a great many things connected with this whole question that I wish to learn.

I think we should all confess that the church prayer-meeting does not always answer this need that we have mentioned very successfully. Some of you, I fancy, would go further, and question whether in many cases it serves any good end whatever. I find it the almost universal testimony of such ministers and others as I meet, that the church prayer-meeting—I will explain in a moment why I qualify the term in this way—that the *church* prayer-meeting is the hardest part of their work to keep in at all satisfactory condition; and we can all easily picture to ourselves a church-meeting which is almost everything that a religious service should not be: an irksome, exhausting duty, in which the leader scolds the rest, while they silently blame each other; and even uncomfortably accuse themselves because they do not all take part more freely in the meeting. Take part freely! There is

only one free, sincere religious exercise in the whole performance, and that is the thanksgiving from every heart, not loud, but deep, when the weary hour reaches its close. Let me say very quickly that the materials for such a picture have not been collected from meetings in our own church. To me, at least, those have been in the main, and some of them in a marked degree, interesting and strengthening and restful. I have been glad when they said unto me, let us go up to the house of the Lord. And yet I have repeatedly asked myself the question, even here: does the church prayer-meeting, as we know it, fully answer this great need of God's people?

Now that the question is fairly before us, I am ready to tell you a few of the things I have had in mind to say. One is this. A church-meeting is one designed for all ages and classes in the church. That fact at once introduces difficulties unknown in some other meetings for prayer. A company of young boys, or a company of young girls, meet together to pray. They are of nearly the same age, familiar with each other's experiences, assured of each other's sympathy and interest: they are accustomed to talk together freely of all their affairs, their work, their study, their play. Surely whenever their hearts are filled with love for Christ, it cannot be, and it is not, very hard to talk with each other freely of that, and to pray with each other for more of it. There is no reason why they

should not, there is every reason why they should, speak and pray freely, and the service is easily made helpful and delightful to all. Such we find to be the fact. Such prayer-meetings of young men, and of young women, and of older women for that matter, and of older men—meetings of any limited class—are quite generally successful in attaining the end desired. The same holds good commonly in the church-meeting, so long as the church is young and small, its members well known to each other; for the close fellowship and identity of interest among them are probably just what have drawn them together as a church. The whole church is a limited class.

But let that church grow older and larger, embracing now persons of all ages and callings and degrees of intelligence. Now, it is not possible nor desirable that this large number of widely different people should still be all intimate with each other. They must cherish Christian love for each other. The more universal sympathy and kindliness they can have, the better; but universal intimacy becomes out of the question. The precious jewel of friendship becomes worthless if broken up too fine. Jesus died for the world because His love for all men was so great; but He chose twelve men to be continually near Him. Out of the twelve there was one disciple whom Jesus loved; and the Lord Himself was able to hold a very different sort of prayer and conference meeting when only the

eleven sat about Him, from what He held when the multitudes thronged to hear His word—"Let not your heart be troubled." How we have all read and reread that friendly conversation: "Thomas saith unto Him; . . . Jesus saith; . . . Philip saith unto Him; . . . Jesus saith; . . . Judas saith unto Him, not Iscariot; Jesus saith." Even those most retiring disciples, Philip and Judas, that we scarcely hear of by name in any more public assemblage, found a tongue there in that small company of friends. How unreasonable we should be to complain because no such familiar conversation was carried on among them publicly in the temple.

And so I say, when any church has grown, and comes to embrace people of all ages, of many neighborhoods, of every degree of intelligence, then that old familiar church-meeting, a small company of friends, talking together freely of their trials and joys, becomes impossible. But sometimes I think the church, not recognizing this impossibility, still aims at the old style of meeting, and is greatly discouraged because of its continual failure. We think we have lost the Christian love which formerly made it so easy for us all to take part: while it may be that the only real change has been the enlargement of numbers, and coming in of strangers, the increasing varieties of condition.

I am convinced that people have often been blamed

unreasonably for not taking part in these church-meetings. We say, you find it easy enough to talk about other things: why not about religion? But is it so? Are they all in the habit of talking about other things before so large a company of people? You overhear a boy describing to a half dozen companions something that he has seen, and that has greatly interested him,—an exciting ball game, or something of that sort. He seems a young Demosthenes; his tones, his gestures, his expressive metaphors. Why, you say to yourself, "That is real eloquence. Boy, come with me; I want you to tell that same story to some of my friends here"; and you lead him into a hall or large drawing-room where a hundred or more people are waiting attentively. "Now, my boy, tell these people what you were saying." He sidles up to the wall, and stares at you helplessly as if he had not an idea in his head. "Why, speak out freely: tell them about the ball game." He knows nothing about the ball game; he is wondering how he can dodge out of the room. Now it would not be at all just to conclude that that boy has really lost his interest in athletics merely because he seems to have lost the use of his tongue; and yet is not that the way we sometimes do reason about these silent attendants at our church-meetings? So, that is one thing I have had in mind to say. When a church has attained considerable size we cannot always expect for our church-

meeting—and it will not be wise to seek—that kind of easy familiarity which belongs only to a small company of friends. We may find it wise to appoint other kinds of services—familiar services; young people's meetings, neighborhood meetings, Sunday-school prayer-meetings, etc.; but the church-meeting, if there is to be any such thing, must place a somewhat different aim before itself.

And now, while we are on this side of the topic, I want to say another thing that I have had in mind: the Scriptures nowhere lay it as a duty upon all Christians to speak in public worship. Christ does lay upon His disciples clearly the duty of confessing Him: of showing that we are not ashamed of Him; of making it known, wherever there might be doubt, that we are on His side. But apart from that, the duty of public speech, or public leading in prayer, is nowhere laid upon the whole membership of the church. Indeed, the Scripture warnings sound as if our danger were rather of too much talking than too little; we are warned against ostentatious prayer, and hollow professions, and loving in word and in tongue, instead of in deed and truth. And the only elaborate directions given as to a public religious service, are to this effect: "If any man speak in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three: and let the prophets speak two or three. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his

peace": evidently Paul was more afraid of the Corinthians' loquacity than of their silence. My friends, it is a very peculiar perversion of the Scriptures, this notion which we have allowed to become so common, that the principal active work—almost the only active work to be done for Christ—is speaking in meeting. Whenever God gives us words to speak in meeting or elsewhere, it is at our peril that we keep silence; but the Scriptures are very far from saying that God does give all His people words to speak in public. And it is also very far from the truth that such public speaking is the only way of doing good work and exerting strong influence. Why, the fact is notorious that the women of the church, while they have not generally felt it a duty to raise their voices in public worship, have yet from the days of the apostles to our own contributed their full share to the working strength of the church. Let us lay this down, then, as a second point: the Scriptures give us no reason to suppose that every Christian, or even every Christian man, is called of God to pray or teach in the public services of the church—much less that such a duty may be laid on every man at any particular service.

And now for another point, a question:—are not the uncomfortable stiffness and awkwardness of many a prayer-meeting due to just this mistaken idea, that it is every one's duty to speak in that meeting? Is not that what makes each silent pause so depressing?

We think that every moment of silence means a waste of time, and that somebody ought to break it instantly; and therefore we grow more and more uncomfortable until it is broken. There is nothing in silence itself to produce such unpleasant results. There is nothing awkward or depressing in the long-continued silence, when we sit in this place and watch the breaking of the bread, and the filling of the cup, and the slow distributing among all the people. We do not wish that silence broken hastily. I revere the Society of Friends for a great many good things that they have done; but for nothing more than the very high honor they have given to silence in public worship. They have taken as the rule of their service what is the dictate both of Scripture and of common-sense: "If you have nothing to say, say nothing." And they can act upon that principle, if need be, through the entire hour of service. But I fancy they do not often have a chance to do that, for when once you take off from men's consciences this paralyzing sense of immediate compulsion, that they must say something, whether or no; soon you are surprised—and they are surprised—at the number of good things they really have to say. I am convinced that not only the awkwardness of that silence, but even the silence itself in our prayer-meetings, spring often from this notion that we all ought to be speaking. I appeal to you on this point; as you sit here on Sunday, with

no opportunity of opening your mouths, do not interesting thoughts often come into your minds which you would rather like to speak: interesting illustrations or confirmations of the preacher's statements,—sometimes, perhaps, emphatic contradictions of his statements? That is my own experience. You would be surprised to know what good sermons sometimes pass through my mind when I have a chance to sit silently in the pew—why, at church as listeners we feel as if we could outpreach St. Paul himself. But at prayer-meeting, with that distressing fear upon us that we may be compelled to speak the next minute, we seem to have not one idea in our heads.

Moreover, may not this mistaken notion account partly for the special reluctance often shown by the men of our churches to come to our prayer-meetings? Why are the women so often the more constant attendants? May it not be because by our customs they can sit through the whole meeting, whether others occupy the time or not, with an untroubled conscience?

Now, I hope we may, at least, lay this down as a fundamental rule of our own church-meeting. There is no sort of compulsion resting on any attendant, man or woman, to say one word. If God has given him a word to speak, that is another matter, which he must settle with God. But we, as a meeting, lay no such obligation upon him; and we welcome him as

one of our fellow-worshippers, once, twice, twenty times—all his life long—even though he never once cares to open his mouth among us. "What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man his own plague and his own sorrow, and shall spread forth his hands toward this house." "Come in, and rest, and pray." I want that to be the well-understood invitation of our church-meeting. Weary are you, tired out by the work of a busy day; too tired to try to collect your thoughts for any public speech or prayer? or burdened are you in spirit, troubled by doubts and fears, with no strength and no light that you could think of offering for the help of others? and you are not drawn to a meeting where you would be expected, if not requested by name, to lift your voice; you turn away from such a meeting. I do not blame you. But our invitation is that you come with us and rest and pray. We shall sing together; and some lesson from God's Word will be read to us; and if any of us have a word of counsel or encouragement or public prayer, we shall speak it; or, if not, we can rest together quietly for a little while in God's house, the place where prayer is wont to be made; knowing every man and woman of us his own plague and his own sorrow; and we can feel that these silent and secret prayers are going up to heaven, God's dwelling-place, as a united supplication of God's people.

Shall we not come to this understanding, then, about our church-meeting? It is a meeting for the church, for all classes in the church and the congregation; for those with much to say, and those with nothing to say; especially for all those who are weary and burdened by the week's struggle with the world and with sin, and who feel this need of resting and praying together. Perhaps this need exists in very many cases where it has not yet been felt. We invite you all.

These are a few of the things that I have had in mind to say on that side of the subject, the side of every man's inalienable right in the house of God to keep silence.

Now, there is much to say; but not much time left for saying it, on the other side—the advantages of public teaching and testimony. I would not give any one the impression that I have been trying to discourage a general taking part in our prayer-meetings. I have tried to encourage it rather. For, as I said a few moments ago, if you once take off from men's consciences the compulsion to speak, I believe many of them will soon be surprised to find how much they have to say. This inalienable right to keep silence lies at the basis of all free and profitable speech.

There is great value in the many-sided instruction and testimony of a hearty prayer-meeting. "At the mouth of two or three witnesses," is one of the old-

est of legal maxims: two or three, or eight or ten, personal witnesses to God's gracious help give us a kind of assurance which no one witness, however eloquent and trustworthy, could give by his own unsupported word,—this, even if all the testimonies were given in just the same form. But, really, if it is true evidence, there will be a most helpful diversity in the testimonies. It takes many pairs of eyes to see all sides of a fact. It took four evangelists, inspired as they were, to give us even what partial knowledge we have of the life of Christ. It takes many readers to expound a passage of Scripture. Every man is narrow, and more or less one-sided.

Moreover, not all the men whom God has clearly called to teach have ever been ordained to the official ministry. The apostles, you remember, once set apart a layman named Stephen, as deacon, to care for the poor; but it was very few days before he was outpreaching the best of them; and until the layman has served out that short but glorious ministry of his, we scarcely hear a word from Peter and the rest of the regular clergymen. Every healthy congregation, I think, has some of these unordained preachers, to whom, whenever they open their mouths to speak, pastor and all do well to listen; and it is greatly for the advantage of our church-meeting that all these men have full opportunity there to say what God has given them to say.

Moreover, this is greatly to their own advantage. As pastor, or as leader of the prayer-meeting, I will not compel any one to take part in it; but as personal adviser, I think I should urge almost every young man to cultivate these gifts. Not necessarily in the church-meeting; but somewhere. I think a Christian man, almost every Christian man, ought to learn to speak for his Lord, and to lead in public prayer. It is a well-known principle of education, that the way to learn anything thoroughly is to teach it. The way to learn thoroughly these precious truths of our religion, is to try to teach them to some one else. Spiritually, and even intellectually, the meeting of prayer and conference is a most valuable exercise to those who give their thought and strength to it. So my personal advice to any young man would be: not, indeed, to take part in meeting for the sake of filling up time, whether he has anything to say or not: but to make it a study that he have something to say, which will be interesting or helpful to some of God's people, and then find the proper time to say it. . . . . [Request was made in closing that members of the congregation should present their thoughts on this topic; especially that those who felt the need of a church-meeting, but had not been drawn to our present form of service, should let us know what sort of service they would feel to be helpful and would like to attend.] . . . .

V.

FOLLOWING IS BELIEVING.*

> "*Then answered Peter, and said unto Him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee.*"—MATT. xix. 27.

I HAVE chosen this text for the sake of the last three words in it, "and followed Thee." It is only one of many passages in these gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which use these words for defining the Christian life. To be a disciple, or, as we should say, to be a Christian, was to follow Christ, often literally to walk about Palestine after Him. And as soon as any one began to follow Christ honestly in this way, he was a Christian. That was the way the subject was understood in those days. "We have forsaken all and followed Thee," Peter says to Christ: as much as to say, "You can see from what it has cost us that we are sincere followers"; and Christ accepts the test by answering, "No man hath forsaken houses or lands or any other precious thing for my sake, but he shall receive an hundredfold."

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* Preached June 6, 1886, at a time of special religious inquiry.

It is always hard to explain to one who does not know how to take the first step toward salvation, how to become a Christian. So soon as one has entered the right way, then we can much more easily tell him how to continue in it. But while he is still outside: why, it is like trying to talk to some foreigner who does not know a single word of our language. If he knew only a few sentences, we might lead him slowly along the path of knowledge by means of those few—but when not one word is intelligible! And often I think those who stand without in the dark, inquiring for the way of light and courage and hope, are only confused by the well-meant directions offered them. Has it not been so with some of us? "What are we to do?" we have been asking; "which way are we to go?" And some one answers, "Come this way": but which is this way? we cannot really see him, cannot tell how he is pointing: and he cannot see us, and his answer leaves us groping as helplessly as before. But at last some helper comes, who has stood in just the same kind of perplexity that we are in, and has been led out of it: and he well understands our troubled cry for help: and places himself beside us: and in words that we can hear, and by steps that we can take, leads us to the Saviour of us all. And then it proves to be not a long journey: there are not many steps: for whenever we reach that divine Saviour, we learn that it was He who heard our cry,

and knew just our perplexity; and chose and sent this one messenger who could lead us back.

Now, my friends, one proof that the Scriptures of the New Testament are inspired of God, is that this divine manifoldness of instruction appears in them. They all tell one story, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; but they tell it in so many different ways, through the lips and the pens of so many different men, that no sincere seeker after the light need wander on long in the dark. Learned Nicodemus; the blind beggar at Jericho; the Samaritan woman; the Roman soldier; the jailer at Philippi; the little children brought in their mothers' arms; those of Cæsar's household; men of all conditions, of all lands, of all tongues, may each of them find here an invitation which they can understand and so receive. That was part of the miracle at Pentecost, you remember: "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, we hear, every man, in our own tongue, wherein we were born, the wonderful works of God."

This whole Gospel is a good tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is one message; but the messengers are many: and each has his own way of telling the story: and you may catch the meaning of the story as told in one form; your neighbor as told in another.

I wish now to say a few words about three of the more prominent forms of this Gospel message.

I. One of these is the message as it came through the lips of Paul. On the whole, I suppose this is better known to the church than any other. If an inquirer should ask, "How can I be saved?" probably nine Christians out of ten would answer in Paul's words: "Not through works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ," or something to that effect. And this is an answer that the church ought to know well, and ought to have always on its tongue's end. It is Paul's answer given out of his own experience, a rich and deep experience, through which God has greatly enriched the theology of the Church universal; and there will always be many inquirers who will need just this direction, need to be brought back from error on this side. But you will remember that in some respects Paul's experience was very peculiar. He had never known Jesus personally: and neither did he derive his faith from those who had known Jesus personally, but from that supernatural vision of the risen Christ granted to himself. Even before his conversion, too, he had always been a very religious man, zealous for God, working with tremendous energy for righteousness and salvation, but failing to get them. And now suddenly, after years of such profitless working, it was shown him that Jesus Christ had bought this salvation for him with His blood,

and was now offering it to him freely. And forevermore that is Paul's gospel: "That salvation which I was working for so hard and could never get, sinner that I am, Jesus Christ has freely given me, at the cost of His own life, and I take it from Him by faith,"—not by works of the law, but by faith in Christ. A marvellous gospel it is, and needed just such a preacher. And to the end of time all proud or weary workers for salvation, who have been vainly trying to fit themselves for God's favor, trying to earn heaven for themselves by good works, will need to be taught through the lips of this apostle. "It is not of works, lest any man should boast."

"Do you think that I am good enough to be a Christian?" some one might ask. "Certainly not; and if you think so yourself, we have great fears for you."

> "Just as I am, without one plea,
> But that Thy blood was shed for me."

We must learn to offer that prayer. And there is no part of the New Testament which warns us more persistently against that deceitful pride, or which humbles us more resolutely before the free grace of God, than these epistles of Paul.

And yet those epistles are not the whole Gospel; and I have no doubt that their tremendous sentences, and their whole representation of Christian truth, have only confused and darkened the soul of many

an inquirer. "Many things in them hard to be understood"—it has always comforted me that old Peter made that frank confession about his beloved brother Paul's letters.

Suppose I have had no thought of justifying myself, or earning salvation, or paying my way into heaven, or indeed of heaven at all: but, through disappointment or sorrow, or some other means, I have been made hungry for a divine companionship to come in and fill my empty life, to purify my foul heart: and while I am looking, and listening, and hoping, some one reads off to me this statement: "Christ has paid the penalty for your sin; He has redeemed you from the curse of the law: here is God's word for it. You have only to believe, and know that you are saved from condemnation." Why, all that may be true; and I may try to believe it; but the whole scheme seems lifeless and mechanical to me. It does not meet my want. I was not trembling at the thought of future condemnation. I was distressed rather at present impurity, and I was hungering for a present divine friend. And will they put me off with a printed sentence in a book—a sort of quit-claim deed for a heavenly mansion hereafter?

We look at the document blankly; and with sore disappointment: we had been looking for a living friend: and they try to satisfy us merely with his signature made long ago on a piece of parchment.

Now, it is true, that such an inquirer, if he looks carefully enough, and long enough, will find even in Paul's Epistles, answers well suited to his own peculiar need: but those answers are to be found more easily, I think, in some other parts of the New Testament. Let us listen then to some of the other messengers, some of those who had known and loved Jesus while He was yet alive.

II. I turn first to that book which has always been so unspeakably precious to the Church, the Gospel of John: the testimony of the disciple whom Jesus loved. What new form will he give to the message? At first we might conclude that no change had been made; for John uses the word "believe" as constantly as Paul, that is his direction to the inquirer. "He that believeth on the Son hath life;—shall not come into condemnation,—is passed from death unto life." The sin of the world is its refusal to believe in the Son. We might suppose that we were still listening to Paul, since we hear the same emphasis given to believing: but in a little while we notice that even while the word is the same, there is something new in the tone of the speaker. Both men speak of believing on Christ: but Paul contrasts this believing with the works of righteousness by which men tried to save themselves: John contrasts believing with the works of unrighteousness which men did not wish to have reproved by the light. I cannot

take time here to follow out this difference in the point of view: I merely suggest it, as an interesting subject of study: and to show that these are two very different speakers, though they point men to the same Saviour. And if any of you cannot well understand what it is to believe according to Paul, it may help you very much to study this same word according to John.

But after all, the treasures of this fourth Gospel are for the Christian rather than the inquirer; most of all for the mature Christian. Almost the last book of the New Testament to be written; written by the beloved apostle after threescore years of loving communion with the Lord who so loved him: the whole history of Christ appears in these pages spiritualized: and one needs some spiritual discernment, *i. e.*, some Christian experience, to open up those wonderful sentences: "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"; "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst"; "The bread that I will give is my flesh"; "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine"; "I am the vine, ye are the branches"; "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him";—I do not believe that John himself could have understood such sayings well enough to record them until

after long years of Christian growth. It is only little by little that any Christian rises to a fair apprehension of what they mean. And what hope have we that the troubled inquirer, ignorant as yet of the first syllable of Christian faith and love, can understand those sayings? They may fill his soul with vague longing: but that definite and practical direction which would tell him how to take the first step — where shall he find that?

III. If we could only know how Jesus Christ Himself would deal with these inquirers. Why, we can. And this brings us to the other form of the message which I wish you to consider; the simplest form of all. We have it in those earliest records of Christ's own dealings with needy men; the first three of our Gospels.

Though those books were committed to writing some years after the Resurrection, yet we know that the substance of them had been the common oral teaching of the apostles from the first. It was their testimony as eye-witnesses to what Jesus did and said from the baptism of John till the time when he was taken up into heaven. So we have in those three Gospels both the record of Christ's own method with inquirers, and also an example of the apostles' method with inquirers in those earliest days of the Church.

Now, if you open those Gospels and read in any of them, either Matthew or Mark or Luke, seeking to

learn how any one could become a Christian in those days, you will not hear much about believing or faith. Much is said about faith, to be sure, but it is generally in connection with miracles. If Christ was to perform a miracle for any one, cleanse a leper, cast out devils, give sight to the blind, put life into the withered hand, they must believe that He could do it; they must believe heartily enough to ask Him honestly, and then He granted the request. We can understand that well enough. Faith becomes a very practical thing put in that light. But as to the spiritual cures—the spiritual salvation, about which we ourselves find it so hard to learn what faith means, Christ Himself did not generally use the word faith at all; He used another word which any one could understand. If one came to Christ in those days with the inquiry, How am I to become Thy disciple?—what was the common answer? You all know; it was, "Follow me." You can hardly open your Gospels anywhere without seeing those words. They give tone to the whole narrative, just as the words "faith" or "belief" give tone to the Epistles of Paul. That is, where Paul would be likely to say "believe," Christ says "follow." No doubt the two speakers are really saying the same thing, for there are not two Gospels, two ways of salvation. They are saying the same thing, but, you see, they have quite different ways of saying it. I do not mean that Christ always

used just this form of words; He did not wish all those who had accepted His Gospel to follow Him literally in His journeys about Palestine. He bade the Gadarene demoniac, whom he had healed, "Go home and tell his friends how great things the Lord had done for him." To the woman who had been taken in sin, He said simply: "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more"; to be sure, that is recorded in John. To another woman, who was a sinner, and who in penitent love, had "washed His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head," He said: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace,"—though some of these could hardly be called inquirers, for they had already found peace in believing. But certainly, if we were required to state our Lord's usual answer to those who asked what He would have them do, it must be in these words, "Follow me." That phrase covers most perfectly what was then understood by Christian discipleship.

Now, if any of you, wishing that you knew how to become Christians, have failed to get much light from Paul's phrase, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," let me offer you Christ's own phrase, "Follow." And it may be that even some of us who already cherish hope in Christ, who have cherished it for years, perhaps, will do well to place ourselves beside the newest inquirers in this study. For, "to believe"—that command is so intangible, so hard to grasp or define,

so hard to translate into actual daily steps of Christian progress; but "to follow"—that ought to be a simpler matter. You have lost your way in a wild region of country; there are steep cliffs falling off on either hand, and much of the forest is tangled, impassable undergrowth: and the night is coming on: and you are becoming very anxious; when at last a man meets you and says that your friends have sent him out to look for you: and that he knows every foot of the country: and that if you believe in him he will bring you shortly to a place of shelter. Believe in him? You never saw him before; you have no guaranty that he speaks the truth. How shall you know whether you do really believe in him or not? You are conscious of grave doubts on the subject. And what has believing a man to do with getting clear of the forest? And at last he says: "Well, how long do you expect to keep me waiting?—we have not much daylight to spare." And you answer: "Why, really, sir, you seem very kind; but I do not see how I am to find out whether I do believe in you or not." "Will you come along with me?" he breaks in. "Why, yes," you say; "I will go with you. I have no other hope of finding my way." "Well," he says, "that is all the believing I care about. Come on." And off you start; and in an hour or so he brings you safely to your friends. You see it is still the command of faith; but put now into its simplest, most practi-

cal form: "Follow me; come on with me, and I will bring your soul out of trouble."

Every one of those earliest disciples who honestly followed Jesus, believed in Him, else they would not have forsaken all to follow Him; but I suppose any of them would have found it hard to analyze their faith. "Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed Him." I fancy they would have found it impossible to account for the confidence in this man which made them willing to forsake their nets for Him. He seemed to them worth more than the nets; He seemed worth following; perhaps that would have been as much as they could say about it. And yet that proved itself to be a saving faith.

We now believe in Christ as our crucified and risen Redeemer; we believe He gave His life to redeem us from the curse of the law. Had those men any such understanding of the matter? Possibly: but at best it must have been very indistinct. They knew the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They had read in Isaiah of that One who was wounded for our transgressions, brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and they had heard John the Baptist say of Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God."

We may believe, we must believe, that they had some vague sense that this Jesus was offering to take from their shoulders the burden of their sin. They could feel the power of His sympathy with them; and that is really the beginning of redemption. They did feel in Him one who could suffer with them in their sin and need; and that is the next thing to suffering for them. When they saw Jesus healing the sick, we read that the words of ancient prophecy naturally came back to their minds: "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." That woman who was a sinner, and who, as He reclined at the feast, ventured to come into the dining-room from behind to anoint and kiss His feet; we can see in such actions something more than the mere joy of forgiveness; there was also the deep gratitude toward One who had brought forgiveness to her, who had freely taken her sin and carried it away.

So we must believe that when sinful men and women were drawn to Christ, and were made willing to forsake all and follow Him, they had in their hearts something of what we mean when we talk about faith in Christ's redemption. But surely that faith was very indistinct; they could not have expressed it; all that they could say, in proof of their discipleship, was, "Lord, we have forsaken all and followed Thee." At that time of great falling

away, as John tells us, when many went back and walked no more with Him, and Jesus said unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Peter's answer was not: "We believe that Thou hast offered to die for us; therefore we cannot go"; but merely, "Lord, to whom shall we go? we believe that Thou art the Christ." They were still well content to follow Him, to stay with Him; and that was evidence enough of faith.

It is very interesting to see how almost the clearest lesson that Christ ever did teach in those days about His own atoning death, was taught by means of this same old habit of simple following, which He had so long been impressing upon His disciples. "Ye must not be ambitious," He was saying; "ye must not seek your own gain and fame; he that will be great among you, let him be your servant. And why? because in so doing you will still be only following me; 'for the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many'" (Matt. xx. 28). Thus it was through following Jesus, at first with an almost unreasoning affection and allegiance, that those men had been led up toward this clearer faith in His divine nature and His sacrificial death. But from the first He acknowledged them for disciples: the following was the only test of faith that He Himself required.

Now, my friends, are we not encouraged still to

employ this same simple test? Jesus Christ no longer appears among us in bodily form, walking the streets of our city: but surely this following Him may still be a practical and definite matter. He Himself sometimes interpreted the phrase by other phrases: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, buildeth his house on the rock." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."

Many of us, to-day, stand in the position of those earliest hearers, rather than the position of Paul: we are not brought for the first time in mature life to perceive the majesty of Christ's character and teaching: but we have long looked upon Him as the Saviour—the Saviour of others, of our parents, of our teachers, of our friends. Through them we have had some sort of acquaintance with Him, enough to know whether He seems trustworthy or not. But for ourselves we have not known how to believe: we have stood still for a long time wondering what it is to believe, as a Christian. Now, why should we not let Christ Himself propose the question to us in His own way: "Have you confidence enough in me to follow me? If so, come on." That is faith enough to start with. Why, if we could say nothing more than those words of Peter: "Lord, to whom else should we go?" or, as the man lost in the wood might say to the guide: "Yes, I will go with you, for I certainly shall

not find the way out by myself"; I believe that the Lord will accept even so dubious a trust as that: for the test question is not, how hearty your faith may be; but, does it make you follow?

For instance, a boy wants to be a Christian, but thinks that to be a Christian might cost him his place in business; for his employer expects him to break the Sabbath, or sell liquor, or do something else that he does not believe Christ would wish him to do: but after a struggle he simply makes up his mind to please Christ in the matter, and let Christ look after the consequences. Now, I am surer that that boy believes in Christ, than if he could repeat, word for word, all that all the Confessions say about justification by faith. He believes in Christ enough to follow Him: that is the test. The following is the practical, visible matter.

Or an ambitious and successful man of business suspects that if he should become a Christian it might be his duty to enter the Christian ministry, perhaps to go on some foreign mission: and he does not wish to do this at all. But at last he makes up his mind: "Well; I do believe that the Lord knows what is best for me after all: and if He should make it clear that I ought to go to the ends of the earth, I will go." That decision is faith; none would be willing to let the Lord lead him unless he had some confidence in the Lord. I have been told of an actual

case where a man's conversion did rest upon this question, Was he willing to go as a foreign missionary? His consent to go to teach the heathen was his coming to Christ: it was all one step.

Or another young man, or woman, suspects that to be a Christian would mean the giving up of many pleasant associations and amusements. He is not sure: he has not been altogether persuaded that these things were wrong, but he has a suspicion that if he should let the Lord take the entire lead of his life, the Lord would say: "Not there, or there, or there: your way lies here." Well, will he take the risk? Has he confidence enough in Christ, to let Christ decide these questions for him?

Or there may be some positive burden to take up, like open confession: there are some in this room, I have no doubt, who feel vaguely that they ought to confess Jesus Christ; or at least that they would have to confess Him if they should ever be thoroughgoing Christians. But they shrink from that one thing with great aversion. And they have been trying for years to find peace in believing some other way. My friends, if you feel Christ leading you up toward this cross, I urge you, in God's name, to follow Him to just that point. Say to Him honestly, "Lord, whatever word of confession Thou hast for me to speak, I will speak it." That for you will be believing in Him.

Ah, if any one can come into that habit of following Christ, that is, of committing our way to Him, and doing as well as we can each day those things which we believe will please Him, I do not think he will be troubled very long to know what it means to believe in Christ. Believe in Him? Why, I follow Him, because I do believe in Him. Believe in His redemption? Yes: for He has led me by paths of humiliation and conscious unworthiness, and contrition and self-sacrifice, up toward that cross on which He, my leader, offered His life a ransom for many. Believe in the forgiveness of sins? Yes: for this strengthening desire in my heart to please Him, what is it but love? and as I search into the grounds of this love, what do I find but that I have been forgiven much; my faith has saved me. All the doctrines of the apostle Paul are wrapped up in every Christian's faith; and will unfold, one after another, before His sight. But the faith is there, the principle of the new life is there, so soon as he will say: "Lead on, Lord, I follow"; or like that little child of olden times, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

"Follow me." Ah, my friends, why not? To whom else will you go; who else has words of eternal life, and divine wisdom, and righteousness? Why should we hesitate, any of us, to commit our way unto the Lord: the Lord who gave His life that He might make that way for each of us a way of salvation?

Why, when we think how hard it is to find our own way, even over the smoothest country; how hard it is to distinguish the path of safety and usefulness and honor; how large a proportion of hopeful business men come to bankruptcy, and no small proportion to disgrace and crime: and when we think of those many questions which seem to grow more and more involved every day, of social customs, and politics, and temperance, and labor reform; through which by some means we are to thread our way toward true success: is it any hard command that He who has so often proved Himself worthy of men's trust, stands before us and says: "Follow me. Commit your life prayerfully to my keeping. Make it your custom day by day to do faithfully what you think I would have you do; and I will care for the results"?

Let me give my testimony that to do this thing takes a great load off one's shoulders. When one is expected not only to pick his own way, but to lead others; to counsel and direct them in these hard questions of religious doctrine, and moral and social custom; and when conscious of his own ignorance, it often seems like the blind trying to lead the blind—and often he feels that he can never open his mouth again to offer his counsel—then to reflect: "But this is not my counsel; I am trying to repeat the words which my Leader has given me to speak; to show others the few things He has shown me; and I may

leave the end of the journey for all of us to Him." I can assure you, my friends, that such believing in Christ becomes a very precious thing, a very practical help, for undertaking the hardest duties of life. And for myself, as I am thrown back more and more upon this habit of following, I seem to come a little nearer also to that mystery of the cross where He suffered for us, where the Lord laid upon Him the iniquities of us all. And I can say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." If any of you have not been able to enter that pathway of faith by Paul's gate of doctrine—the great doctrine of atonement, I urge you to enter by this gate of simple obeying—the gate which Jesus has left open for every troubled seeker. "Have you confidence enough," He asks, "in my wisdom and love, to follow me? If so, come on. Those who will follow me whithersoever I lead them are the believers in me."

VI.

THE HAND OF ANANIAS.

'And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias, coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight."—ACTS ix. 12.

IT is a fact of common observation in the natural world that life springs from life. Some years ago, it is true, the fact was disputed. A few scientists claimed to have witnessed cases of spontaneous generation, as they called it—inorganic matter coming to life without contact with previous life. But more careful experiments have proved them in error. What they supposed to be inorganic matter really had the germs of life already in it. So now, I believe, intelligent men of science agree that the common opinion on this question has been correct. So far as we can observe, at least, all life, animal or vegetable, springs from previous life. Of course, if one turns his thoughts back far enough, he must come to some starting-point: for it is clear that our world, in its present habitable condition, has not been eternal; but that starting-point was, as we believe, God's own act of Creation.

Looking from my window I see a tree just putting forth its leaves or its fruit. In that marvellous pro-

cess I see the present action of God's power; but in it I see also an event which finds a place in the entire vegetable history of the world. This tree, now blooming or bearing, carries back my thoughts by an unbroken line of ancestry to that third period of the creation when God said: "Let the earth bring forth the tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself . . . and it was so." So both agencies are needed—God's present quickening power, and also the impetus of previous tree-life, to make this tree put forth leaves and bear fruit before my eyes.

Now, both experience and Scripture teach us that the laws of spiritual life show many close resemblances to the laws of physical life: so it is in this particular. Whenever a man is born anew into the kingdom of God, we recognize first the gracious work of God's Spirit in his soul. But in general we must recognize, also, the contact between this new life and that life which already existed in the world. This new birth is an event in that long spiritual history of our race which reaches back through saints and fathers and apostles to the very earliest of those men who have walked with God.

In general, I say, we can recognize this contact; but sometimes it may seem as if we had come upon exceptions—sinners who have been converted to God by the direct action of His creative Spirit, without any contact with other believing men. A most re-

markable case in point is that of the apostle Paul: a disbeliever in Jesus Christ, travelling with other disbelievers, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Church of Christ, afar from any Christian influence, suddenly struck to the earth by a light from heaven, and converted by one word from Christ Himself.

We might say that this was a transaction with which other Christian men had nothing whatever to do. So far as this man was concerned, the whole world might have been dead in its sins, possessing no germ of spiritual life; for God Himself, without any human co-operation, took this unbeliever and made him a Christian. Yes, we might say all this; but we should then be overlooking a very important part of the narrative. Not to speak of the words of those Christian martyrs whom Paul himself had been persecuting: words which had come to him already as goads, against which he found it hard to kick; and the divine truth of which was now flashed into his soul by this light from heaven: not to speak of those, there was needed other human co-operation with God before this new life and light in this man's soul should be complete. He had been arrested on his way to Damascus—converted, if you please—while far from any helpful Christian influence; but we can hardly say that as yet he had been born into the light and joy of Christian faith; for all that the

Scripture tells us is that "He was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink." The old life of disobedience had been suddenly checked; but those three days seem more like stupor than like the beginning of new life. Then at length, under God's direction, the disorganized material of Saul's soul was touched by the spiritual life of a living Christian; and at once he received his sight and was filled with the Holy Ghost, and was baptized and began to preach Christ. This latter part of his conversion is what I have offered for your study in the words of our text.

The Lord spoke to Ananias about Saul, and said: "He hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight." "A man coming in and putting his hand on him."

The touch of a living man's hand needed to complete the work of God's Spirit in Saul's heart.

I. We can multiply similar instances from the Bible. In the slumbers of the night God sends a vision to some heathen king, Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar; a direct revelation, we might think, from God Himself to one who hitherto had not known Him. But no; this proves not to be as yet a revelation, an illumination; but merely, if we might say so, a making the darkness visible. The dream can arouse the king's curiosity, but cannot gratify it. A believing man must be found to give interpretation to the dream; a

Joseph, a Daniel, some man in whom is the Spirit of the holy God; his human words added to the vision from heaven make known God's will to the heathen. The youth David is destined by God to be the great man of his age; greatest in action, greatest in word, and what precious revelations were granted him from heaven; his nature seemed like a well-tuned harp, responsive to every breath of the Divine Spirit. The holy Church throughout all the world still listens for the echoes of his heavenly music. Yet David must first be set apart for his work as psalmist and king by the touch of a holy man. Samuel, the prophet, must anoint the lad with oil, and then the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him.

And Samuel himself, how did he become a prophet? How did the spiritual life begin with him? We go back to the time of his childhood, and find it a period of sad religious declension in Israel: "The word of the Lord was precious: there was no open vision." And the word of the Lord came to this child, calling him by name; once, twice, three times, "Samuel." But he did not know the voice of the Lord; he could not receive the communication until aged Eli, the priest, interpreted the word to him. The new prophet was fully born at that moment when Eli taught him to say, "Speak, Lord: for Thy servant heareth."

Or we may carry our thoughts back to the earlier and still greater prophet, Moses; a man with whom

true religion seems to have been born again in a dead world. Alone in the desert, by the burning bush, he received his revelation, and then came and declared it to the people; a man with whom God talked face to face; as the scientists would say, a case of spontaneous generation in spiritual things. But read the story more carefully. Had this man's faith in God no vital connection with the faith of God's people before Him? Why, he drew in his faith and knowledge of the true God with his mother's milk. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents; by faith, when he was come of years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." This Moses was already a veteran in the true faith, before ever he received that revelation by the burning bush. And it is a most interesting circumstance that the crowning glory even of that revelation had been already anticipated for Moses in the earliest and dearest word that his childish lips had learned to speak. That God's highest name was Jehovah, that was the revelation: and the name of Moses' own mother was Jochebed, "Jehovah, my glory."

So even here we have not found a man starting out upon his religious life by a mere impulse from within or from above without help from other believers; there had been the human touch of faith, the blessed influence of a faithful home.

But suppose we turn back further still, to him who

seems to stand at the very beginning of the world's religious history, Abraham, the father of the faithful.

This, we think, must be the last step that we shall need to take. We reach here an independent birth of true religion in the world: no, we do not; it proves as hard to find such a beginning of spiritual life as it was to find a beginning of physical life. For this Abraham, returning from a successful battle, is met by a king, Melchizedek, priest of the most high God, who blessed him, and received tithes from him. Still another step: and if we cannot go yet further, and trace the spiritual origin of Melchizedek, it is because history gives no account of his origin, spiritual or physical. The Scripture itself dwells upon the peculiar mystery surrounding that man, in that he stands before us without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. In other words, we have reached in him the farthest limits of historical knowledge: but always, so far as we can see anything, we see the touch of some believing man co-operating with the revelation from heaven before the new spiritual life in any soul is thoroughly started.

I need hardly remind you of instances in the New Testament. Peter interpreting to Cornelius his vision. Paul declaring to the Athenians the God whom they ignorantly worshipped. The Baptist directing Andrew and John to Jesus; Andrew bring-

ing Peter; and John, James; and Philip, Nathanael. Thus, even in the days of our Lord's flesh, when He Himself still spoke with human voice, and touched with human hand, He began to avail Himself of the co-operation of believers in order to win new believers. Thus the entire Scriptures sustain the principle which we have discovered in the conversion of Paul. The touch of Ananias must be added to the vision from heaven before this new Christian is ready to go forward believing, rejoicing.

II. Is not this Scriptural principle sustained by common Christian experience?

Beyond the borders of Christendom on every side are spread out the vast territories of heathenism. How are those people to be enlightened and converted? For a long time Christians seem to have believed that when God wished the heathen converted He would convert them by some new operation of His Spirit. A hundred years ago, Wm. Carey's missionary proposals were met by just this answer. It was thought presumptuous for men to undertake a work which God had left alone. "Brother Carey," one of the older ministers exclaimed: "when God wants the heathen converted He will convert them without help from you and me." In some way God was to send out His Spirit, and do the work. But, my friends, do you suppose God has not always been sending out His Spirit to heathen

lands? Are we not sure that the same God who gave visions to Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar has been ready to enlighten and bless the heathen of every age? He has not overlooked one of them: not a single heart in the darkest regions of Africa, or the most crowded provinces of Asia, or the vast forests and prairies of America, at which this Great Spirit has not knocked for admission. And far be it from me to say that He has not sometimes found admission into such hearts, bringing with Him the germs of true spiritual life.

But they remain germs merely: they do not develop into the abundant fruitage of Christian character and faith. And why not? Through any lack of God's spiritual power? No: for lack of the other agency which must work with God in the producing of life. The heathen world has been waiting for a grasp of the hand from the Christian Church. That vast mass of inorganic soul-material ready to live, must be everywhere touched by life: and then we shall find that the quickening power of God is still ready to work. We shall find it; we do find it. "Each breeze that sweeps the ocean brings tidings from afar," from the remotest islands, and the darkest continents, of the continued spreading of life. Wherever Ananias is found ready to put his hands on Saul, there blind Saul is found quickly receiving his sight.

III. The same principle we find operating in our own neighborhood, among persons of our own acquaintance. Wherever new spiritual life appears, two agencies seem still to have been working together: the living power of God's Spirit, and also the influence of some other Christian life.

1. God is at all times directly influencing the hearts of men, both by His providences, as we can see; and by His Spirit, as we believe. By His providences, sometimes by sorrow, by joy; by failure, by success; by loneliness, by the blessings of society, God prepares men to believe in Him, and find their joy in Him. And these providences are accompanied everywhere by a sort of undeveloped religious experience, by inner impulses of rebuke, and remorse, and spiritual hunger, and encouragement: all this perhaps while as yet the man has not been brought into any vital connection with Christians or Christianity. The Bible, though always within his reach, has been always a sealed book. But now at last by some means the seals are broken. This treasure-house of human testimony to divine grace is thrown open to him. And the words of these ancient men, David, and John, and Paul, co-operating with the message from God which he himself had heard, but not understood, arouse the new life of faith and obedience in his soul. As he looks back, he can now see how God had long been preparing him for this new birth. But in spite

of the preparation he remained in darkness and spiritual stupor until these ancient messengers of God came and laid their hands upon him, and gave him sight.

2. But you would all feel that I have not here described the usual process of conversion. Here and there perhaps a man is so grasped by the testimonies of this ancient book, that he needs no further human encouragement to enter the new life. But most of us want the grasp of a different sort of hand. The Scripture, at least until we have enjoyed long acquaintance with it, seems so impersonal and distant. The human element seems to us so largely to have dried out of it. Even Peter declared pathetically centuries ago, that "the Patriarch David was both dead and buried." And now Peter himself also both dead and buried. And any grasp of the hand that those dead men could give, would not seem fitted to strengthen us much in our perplexity and darkness. Thus it often seems that the force of human testimony has faded out of this book: and we have here nothing left but a message from God, which itself needs explanation and confirmation before we men can be enlightened by it. You have not known many instances where any one was converted to the Christian life by mere solitary study of the Scriptures? Have you known many instances where persons have been converted to the Christian life through listening

merely to the public preaching of God's word? No doubt there are such instances: there may be many of them altogether. But more commonly, I think, this public preaching, while it may instruct, and convince, and convict, so preparing the way for conversion, or directing the Christian life after conversion, yet lacks that living contact which is needed for the first producing of life. The preaching comes—so far as there is truth in it and power—as the word of God, rather than the word of man. The preacher cannot, must not, single out his hearers by name, and tell them which words he is speaking to each of them. Therefore, it seems to me, in most cases, this public preaching of the Gospel remains on the divine side of the work. It is a part of God's message to the soul of the hearer: like the vision from heaven which had been granted to Saul. If the work is to be completed, if the soul is to be truly born again, the need remains that some man come to that single hearer and lay his hands upon him; and then by some means through this personal contact of soul with soul the spiritual life begins.

Is it not so? Even in those services whose special aim is the conversion of unbelievers, we do not expect, do we, to see the conversion completed satisfactorily by the public service; but we do hope to see men there convicted of sin and aroused to a spirit of inquiry. On the day of Pentecost Peter spoke with

such convincing power that the multitude were pricked in their heart; and, as a result, they said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" The success of the public sermon was that it drove the hearers into this inquiry-meeting. The public impersonal discourse had come to them as a message from God; now their hearts craved direction and encouragement from men; "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" As a result of this inquiry, some three thousand of them gladly received the word and were baptized.

Ever since, I think, in times of deep conviction, when the experiences of the day of Pentecost are at all reproduced, it has been found needful to supplement the public preaching of the truth by some such personal questioning and directing, so that each darkened soul groping for the light may be personally touched and helped by some one who can see. This has been the case, so far as I know, in all extensive and successful evangelistic services.

But I hasten to say that such extensive evangelistic services do not represent the whole work—perhaps not always the best work of Christ's Church. It should be remembered that the book of Acts, while describing thirty years of apostolic labor, records no second day of Pentecost. That day, with its notable experiences, does not stand as a sample of the methods and the success usual in the early Church. More

commonly the growth of the Church was such as our Lord Himself described in His parables — the grain of mustard-seed growing rapidly but imperceptibly into the tree; or the grain of corn planted and springing up, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." That day of Pentecost was like the wonderful miracle of the loaves; the usual growth of the Church has been more like the yearly ripening of harvest.

So let us never imagine that a church of Christ must lie stagnant except in times of so-called revival; or that conversions should be looked for only from special evangelistic methods. Wherever the Church exists, it should be expected to grow; wherever believers come together to hear God's word, and sing, and pray, and commemorate Christ's death, they should always look for and work for the conversion of unbelievers. And so—this is the conclusion that we have been approaching—so, even when there are no formally appointed meetings for inquiry, this old question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" ought to be continually asked and answered among us. This Word of God, and these public services of God's house, are or should be always arousing the spirit of inquiry in unbelievers; and every Sabbath-school class, every Christian home, every Christian school, every friendship, every acquaintance even, between those who know the Lord and those who

know Him not, should give room for this inquiry. The responsibility for this personal work rests on all true believers in Christ. And in any community where Christians all feel this responsibility, and live up to it, there it is that souls are continually turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. On the other hand, wherever Christians are content to let the Word and Spirit of God do the whole work, withholding their own co-operation, offering no hand of help to those in darkness, there the Word of God seems to lose its converting power, and we mourn that God has withdrawn His Spirit, and are constrained to wait hopelessly until such time as He sees fit to revive us again.

I was greatly impressed not long ago by the remark of a very little child; she had been promised a bit of ground for a flower-bed whenever the time for planting should come; and some one was speaking to her of the "rain which God sends to make things grow, and the sunshine, too; for it takes both the rain and the sunshine": "Yes," said the little one, "and me, too, to put in the seeds." The theology of these little children is often the very best. God sends the rain and the sunshine,—His Word, which like the rain shall not return unto Him void; and the enlightening and life-giving spirit of grace; but, if the garden is to be a success, it takes us too, you and me, to put in the seeds.

My friends, we who have been made alive in Jesus Christ, are we all awake to this responsibility; are we all doing this our share of this work? I fear we sometimes stifle the conviction which forces itself into our souls, that this one, or that one, still walking in darkness, looks to us for light. The Lord came to Ananias in a vision and told him that Saul wanted him: He came to Saul also and told him that Ananias could help him. We do not talk much about visions in these days: but I am sure that still some unseen spiritual power often draws men together, the man needing to be helped and the man able to help. Let us as Christians beware how we resist that drawing. We are often loath to go. We think our words will be ineffectual; will be resented, will do more harm than good. Ananias was loath to go, struggled against his mission: "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem: and how he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name." He could hardly believe that the same divine influence which was drawing him to Saul was drawing Saul to him. Yet, in spite of doubts and fears, he obeyed the Lord. What if he had disobeyed, what if Saul had been left in darkness! Remember this: the same spirit which is inclining you to help your friend may incline, often has inclined, him to accept help from you. And let it not be said that any inquiring Saul has

waited in vain for that hand of help which God has urged you to reach out to him.

And just one word as we close, to those who are waiting to be helped. Perhaps you might conclude from the text that you must continue to wait until some Christian offers help to you. It would have seemed of little use for blind Saul to start out in that strange city seeking for Ananias: he must wait until Ananias came to him. But was not the next chapter in this book of the Acts written for the very purpose of correcting such a false impression? There also we have two men and two visions: one man, Cornelius, needing help: and the other man, Peter, able to give help: but in that case Cornelius must send to Peter before Peter goes to Cornelius. If you want counsel and prayer from some Christian, do not wait to see whether he will come to you; but first go to him: and be sure that you will get the help. For this same spirit which has been urging you to ask, has been preparing him to give.

Ah, my friends, let us not be disobedient to these heavenly visions. The great purpose for which we are placed side by side in this world seems to be the giving and receiving of help; the giving and receiving of this light of life. If you have not been brought into the light of Christian faith, God directs you to some believer, pastor, teacher, parent, friend, who can lay his hand upon you that you may see. When you

do rejoice in that light, God directs you in turn to some one still groping in the darkness,—some one to whom, without impoverishing yourself, you can communicate the gift of life that you have received. Be not disobedient: go to him, trusting in that divine direction, even as Ananias went to Saul, saying: "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight."

VII.

AN EASTER SERMON.

> *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again."*—JOHN X. 17.

"I AM the good shepherd," Christ said, "and I lay down my life for the sheep." "Therefore," He continues, "doth my Father love me." Because Christ was the good shepherd of men, therefore He was the well-beloved Son of God—because, out of His own love for the sheep, He would lay down His life for them. But—here this question rises before us—what now will become of the helpless sheep? Must not the truly good shepherd, whom God could fully approve and love, guard His own life for the sake of the sheep? We have read of generals, in a moment of reckless daring, throwing away their lives in battle, so bringing defeat to their own army. Some of us remember how Xenophon describes the senseless self-sacrifice of Cyrus at Cunaxa. For the sake of his soldiers he ought to have spared his own life, not thrown it away. Yet, on the other hand, a commander who spares himself from personal cowardice at once loses, and deserves to lose, all regard from

his soldiers. When once it became suspected that Louis XIV., the great king, who was shedding his subjects' blood in every country of Europe, was himself a coward, his prestige was gone forever.

Thus it appears that the good commander, so far as he himself is concerned, must be ready to lay down his life for his troops: but for their sakes must guard his life with care—better that hundreds of them be sacrificed than that his life be risked. The good shepherd must be willing to lay down his life for the sheep; but for their sakes he must be able and careful to retain his life, else the helpless flock will be left without guard or guide.

How is Christ the good shepherd of men? Let the cross answer, where He laid down His life for us. But is that the good shepherd? What remains for us, the helpless flock: our guardian recklessly sacrificed: ourselves scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd? What remains for us? Let this day answer, my friends; this day of the Resurrection. Reckless of His own life, our shepherd was not reckless of us. He died for us: He lives for us; He died that He might live to care for us. He thus fills perfectly both parts of the shepherd's office, receiving the entire approval and love of God, because for our sakes He laid down His life that He might take it again.

I wish to study with you, this morning, the subject of self-sacrifice in the light of the resurrection.

I. Sometimes that subject has been allowed to remain in other imperfect light, or perhaps in no light at all; and studying it there, we easily become involved in error. Self-sacrifice, as an unconditional final fact, is thought to be man's duty. "Lay down thy life," is the command; "for the sake of what?" "for the sake of laying it down." That is man's virtue, to sacrifice himself. Not always in the form of wilful suicide; that would be the logical conclusion; and that conclusion has sometimes been reached, as when the Hindoo devotee would cast himself beneath the wheels of Juggernaut. More commonly, however, divine law, or else some instinct of the soul, teaches men that "the Almighty has fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter."

But repeatedly, constantly, everywhere, men have shown themselves disposed, even when they shrink from this logical and tragical conclusion, to take the earlier steps of such purposeless and hopeless self-sacrifice. Not that they sincerely wish to do this; but they think this the thing to be done. Vice, they think, is self-indulgence: virtue is self-denial. That is the complete definition. If you would do right, if you would please God, if you would make the Father love you, deny yourself, sacrifice yourself, lay down your life. Here is a life of the body with its activities and enjoyments: "lay that down," the ascetic says: "fasting, painful watching, the sacrifice of every

comfort, that is virtue; that is what God loves; mortify your body." Here is a life of the intellect, with its activities and enjoyments, in the domain of literature and art and music and science. "Deny yourself that," says this voice of supposed duty. "Those pursuits give you keen personal delight; therefore sacrifice them all. To give up what pleases you, is to please God." Augustine had been used to delight in the eloquence of Cicero. At length he seemed to hear a voice telling him that he must give up either Cicero or Christ. Lay down the life of your intellect, and so please God.

Here is a life of the affections, with its activities and enjoyments: in the home, among one's friends, in the social circle where one has been placed. Keener enjoyments here than were ever to be found in the mere bodily life, or in the mere intellectual. What shall be done with this life? "Lay it down," said the ascetic. Banish yourself from that society; break those ties of friendship; leave forever the blessed enclosure of that home; bury yourself behind the walls of the convent: that is to please God. Thus lay down, so far as you can without actual suicide, the whole earthly life; then will God love you. That has been always the impulse of what we call asceticism, to lay down life for the sake of laying it down; the same impulse whether it appears in an ancient Pharisee, or a mediæval monk,

or a Puritan of later times; or in any man among us, whatever he calls himself, who believes that just to sacrifice himself is to please God. It seems as if the brow of this precipice lay everywhere, not far from the course of our steps. We always shrink from that abyss: we hate the thought of sacrifice, we love the thought of indulgence: and yet there is a strong impulse,—at times it has proved itself an uncontrollable impulse,—to draw nearer the awful brink, and even cast ourselves over it. "Lay down your life, throw away your life, and so please God."

But against this blind impulse of asceticism, reason has always been making her voice heard. Life is not an evil thing, to be thrown away: it is to be cherished rather, and made the most of. Bodily comfort, intellectual gratification, the enjoyment of home and of society, they are good, keep them: so says man's common-sense. And so also says the Word of God; "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused: if it be received with thanksgiving." Do not lay down your life, but make the most of it. Common-sense and Scripture seem to be at one against this senseless impulse of asceticism, self-destruction.

II. But must we then renounce forever that noble dream of sacrifice?—for it was a noble dream. That old convent was the monument of a sublime fancy floating heavenward. The man who has cast himself

suicidally from the cliff, was half persuaded that he should fly. Is there no kind of self-sacrifice left for man which sober reason can approve? Most certainly there is. Wherever man lays down his life, not for the sake of laying it down, but that he may take it again in some higher form, then our reason says that he does well.

Enjoyment is good: but any one in his right mind would sacrifice an hour's enjoyment to-day for months of enjoyment next year. The young man who wastes all his money gambling on the steamer, and so forfeits the pleasures of his entire foreign tour, is a fool: quite apart from the sin of gambling, we all call him a fool. Better the most monotonous week at sea, than to lose months of pleasure on shore.

Again, bodily comfort and bodily development are good. But will you grasp these and retain them at every cost? Will you set your heart on this one thing; to have always what you like best to eat, and the softest bed on which to sleep; and the largest physical growth? Any of us would be ashamed to confess so ignoble a purpose. Pleasant food and comfortable raiment,—I am glad to have them if they fall in my way; health, strength, agility, physical symmetry; very desirable gifts, if they do not cost too much: but you honor the boy who will go hungry many days rather than go ignorant all his life; who will sacrifice that perfect exuberance of health which

attends a life of leisure in the open air, in order that he may exercise and feed his mind. Many of us would say, "I should like to have again the bodily strength, and the perfectly untroubled health which belonged to me ten or fifteen years ago. And I could doubtless have kept them. Perhaps I could even now regain them. But I would not do it at the cost of this higher intellectual life which I have taken up by laying them down." Any man would say, whose mind has begun to taste life: "Let me stagger now under the weight which once I could have held at arm's length; let me now pant and gasp at the ascent, up which once I would have run at full speed; let my sight be dimmed, and my bodily taste fail; rather than relinquish this larger activity of the mind, this more piercing vision, this more delicious repast." We do not despise that bodily health and pleasure, that lower life. No; keep as much of that as may be; the more the better. But cheerfully lay that life down, when so you can take up this higher life of the mind. Then you have an act of reasonable self-sacrifice; not the ascetic's self-destruction.

Reason itself, without the help of Christianity, leads every thoughtful man along that first step from the physical to the intellectual; laying down the one, so far as he must, that he may take up the other.

And our reason also discovers further steps in the same progress.

That first step would have been well illustrated by the boy who goes hungry often, and cold, in order that he may go to college. But suppose we follow that boy further; and suppose that the bitter experience befalls him which is befalling one and another every year. He has indulged his intellectual tastes just enough to thoroughly arouse them: he has seen just enough of literary culture to make a life without it seem like the day without the sun:—when his father is struck down by illness or death. His mother, younger brothers and sisters, left face to face with want. He has been able by great self-denial to support himself while pursuing his studies: but it would be quite impossible to take up any additional burden. To continue his studies now would be to leave those who are dearest to him in great privation, or else dependent upon strangers. I do not think that a heavier cross than that is often placed before men in this life: but many a young man, whose biography no one thinks of writing, has taken up that cross. With an effort, painful as if he were plucking out his right eye and casting it from him, he closes his books forever: accepts some position where he can draw a salary, and thus gives his chosen life for those whom he loves. Not only the lower physical life; that were a small matter; that he had sacrificed long ago. He gives now his intellectual life; lays it down for those whom he loves. But has this been

only a laying down of life? has nothing been taken up? Has that young man's nature been dwarfed or mutilated by this sacrifice? Is he not more of a man, than if neglecting his family, and going on with his studies, he had become another Lord Bacon? Is there not a life of the affections that soars above that of the mere intellect?

But, if it be so, we have not yet reached the end of the course. Taking step after step, we always see other steps beyond. The self-sacrifice brings its reward: what starts as a step down from the present possession proves to be a step up to purer and richer possessions. Laying down the present life, we take another and better life. But is it not true that as we advance along this course, the steps become more difficult: the larger life restored becomes less tangible to our common-sense as we advance? We grow conscious of a need that some higher wisdom, some divine revelation, guide and support our own reason. For observe what point we have reached, what steps we have taken hitherto. Denying oneself an hour's gratification to-day, for the sake of many weeks of enjoyment just ahead. Any one but a fool sees the wisdom of that self-sacrifice. Denying oneself needless indulgence of the body in order to gratify and develop the mind:—most of us would cheerfully undergo more or less of that self-sacrifice.

Denying the mind for the sake of the heart; giv-

ing up the life of culture and intellectual delight for the sake of mother and brothers and sisters. Does the man get back more than he gives away? We are not quite so sure about it. We think that he does. In our more exalted moments, perhaps, we are sure that he does; we then see that he does. Yet there is something to be said on the other side. It is often hard both for him and for others not to regret the sacrifice. A very precious part of him, he has buried; and we are moved to weep beside the tomb. The man who could have revelled among the intellectual treasures of the ages, and perhaps by his own genius have added to them, to wear out his days behind the dusty counter or adding endless columns of stupid figures; ah, the deed was noble, but it was very sad. And yet the responsive love of those for whom he laid the life down, is precious consolation to him.

But now let us take another step. Suppose this man, whose course we are watching, learns that the wealth by which he has comfortably supported his family belongs to others; to some soulless corporation, we will say. He alone possesses the evidence of title; the secret is his. To keep it will injure no one; what are these few thousands to the great bank or railroad? To reveal the secret will plunge those nearest him into want, perhaps almost into disgrace. The step is harder than death. And yet there is a compulsion which drives the man to make that secret known.

He lays down his life once more; the life of the body, and of the intellect, and of the affections, all have now been sacrificed.

And what remains? Is there anything: has he thrown his life away? Has he cast himself over the cliff? Or has he still taken up again a larger life; one controlled by motives higher even than the most sacred natural affections, and capable of affording delights purer than those of the purest human love? Which is it? This sacrifice of all that one loves most for a thought, a fancy, an abstract notion of duty and honor;—is it a fruitless sacrifice, or has the man still taken up more than he has laid down? How hard it is to answer as our hearts impel us to answer! We feel that he has done nobly; we wish to think that he has done wisely; but what precious things he has thrown away, and how shadowy is all that he has taken back! Something it is, if indeed it be anything, that cannot be discerned by this eye of sense, or even by this eye of the understanding; cannot be weighed in the scale of our reasonable calculation.

And why should we stop with the sacrifice of things as dear as life? The final step in this progress that we have been tracing, is often the sacrifice of life itself; not laying it down for the mere sake of laying it down, like the ascetic, and yet laying it down for reasons whose value cannot be estimated in any money-exchange of the world. Why should the

soldier cast away his life in battle? "Honor pricks him on." Yes, but the man of mere fleshly sense replies, "Can honor set to an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honor? A word: air. Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. Is it insensible then? Yea, to the dead; therefore I'll none of it." And who can show that old Falstaff did not reach a wise conclusion?

Here we have a man, Polycarp, or Cyprian, or Sir Thomas More, it may be, or Hugh Latimer, who has offered him this simple choice, to suffer death like a felon, or else to renounce the faith which he has professed. He chooses the death. He lays down his life for a word, a creed, a sacrament; something as light as air. At once follows the pain of martyrdom, and then he is gone, vanished like smoke; perhaps vanished in smoke. And what shall we say of his sacrifice? Noble, does your heart tell you that it is? Godlike; something to be reverently commemorated by latest generations? Yet according to any reasonable calculation it is unutterably sad. It goes to prove that every noble life is tragic. Just as the life becomes worthy of reverent commemoration it is extinguished, and the grave proves to be the goal of every human virtue.

When man's life becomes worth the most, then

he lays it down and takes nothing again. That is the history of human life as read by man's unaided reason. All the world in its pursuit of holiness must follow the course which the Christian Church has been following in thought these few days past. So soon as we find our perfect man, one altogether worthy of our love and of God's love; one strong enough in virtue to redeem his people; not a thief who comes to kill and destroy; not a hireling who runs at the approach of danger; but the good shepherd who loves the sheep, and guides them and guards them:— so soon as we find this perfect Son of man, and begin to follow Him, where does He lead us?—why, to the hill of Calvary; 'it is finished' on the cross, that perfect life. And then the world's best hope lies buried in the sepulchre.

Ah, there may be laughter and good cheer on the lower plane of eating and drinking; but so soon as a man starts upward, following the impulses of his deepest nature, successively laying down the lower life to take again the higher, how surely he comes at last into these regions of tragedy. The last act required of him is a laying down, with no taking again. The shepherd is smitten, "and the sheep of the flock are scattered abroad." This is the end of the ideal and perfect human life; "They take Him down from the cross and lay Him in the sepulchre."

IV. But, my friends, is that the end? Is the tomb

the last chapter of this history? The eye of sense answers, "Yes"; the faithless reason answers, "Yes." But there has always been a deeper reason in man which could not rest content with that answer; and there is now in the world a faith which meets that answer with a confident denial. No, no, no; that tomb is not the final chapter of the book. The last step required of exalted humanity, the last earthly step of Jesus Christ was in no way different from the preceding steps, except that it carried Him up so far that now our eyes can no longer follow. Still, as before, He has laid down His life that He might take it again. And this is the concluding chapter, not the final laying down, but the taking it again for ever and ever.

Yes, there are in this world of sorrow and death millions of believers who have learned that blessed chapter by heart. Where can you go to-day in all the world and not hear the sweet echo of its sentences? "Very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun." Why, for once nature itself seems to have caught the story of redemption. The sun was setting when they placed Him in the sepulchre. The sun is rising now. "And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus." Yes; this whole earth is but a burying-place. "The hills, rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun, the vales stretching in pensive quietness between—and poured around all, old ocean's gray and melan-

choly waste, are but the solemn decorations all of the great tomb of man." Ah, but the tomb is, or shall be, empty; it is not a final resting-place, it is a thoroughfare. The Lord stepped into it, that He might step out from it. "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen. Remember how He spake unto you." Yes, the mystery of the cross has now been illumined by the rising of that Easter sun. "He laid down His life that He might take it again."

Ah, my friends, that heavenly light which has once shone into our world must never more be extinguished. It must never fail us. It is needed not only to die by courageously, but to live by courageously; not only for that last laying down of the whole earthly life, but for each earlier laying down of life that God requires. When one must sacrifice the body for the mind, let him see himself a step nearer those things which are unseen and eternal; the gain that has come to him in the enlarging of this higher intellectual nature cannot be measured by any scale of years; the treasures of knowledge should be estimated in the light of eternity. And even the body that was sacrificed,—is there not a spiritual body?

When one has sacrificed the life of his mind for the life of his heart; has cast away those treasures of knowledge, buried that intellectual faculty, shall we mourn as those without hope beside the tomb

where so precious a part of him lies buried? Not if we believe the story of this Easter day. Whatever good thing he has laid down in the way of Christian duty, of devoted love, that good thing he shall take again. One of these days you will go to the tomb where that man buried his intellectual faculty and find it empty. That which was buried has risen again. Why, even in this short earthly course how often it happens that he who loses his intellectual life for Christ's sake, finds it. And if not so here, will there be no leisure for study in God's higher university?

Or those still more bitter sacrifices: when treasures of love dearer than life, and often life itself, are required,—and all for a word, a thought, a notion of honor, or integrity, or truth: oh, seek not the living among the dead. Such an act of sacrifice we feel to be almost unearthly: but a very little film of air separates it from the darkness and cold that lie beyond. Darkness? We see to-day that it is heaven's own light that lies beyond, and shines back upon us through every such act of Christian devotion; convincing us that the nearer any disciple comes to his Master's cross, the nearer he is to the eternal life, and the infinite joy which are at God's right hand. The more devotedly, the more recklessly any man lays down his life,—if it be for Christ's sake, in the doing of Christ's work,—the more surely and abundantly he takes it again. That is the light which Easter

sheds on the whole region of Christian sacrifice. Let us come into that light. Let us look through that empty tomb. Let us hear that reverberated sentence of glad tidings, "The Lord is risen; the Lord is risen indeed." Let us be with the disciples when Jesus Himself stands in the midst of them, and says unto them, "Peace be unto you."

Ah, but have we any right in that company? Have we followed Him in His humiliation? have we stood beside the cross? Only the Lord's disciples saw Him risen. Easter has no good tidings for those who will not suffer with Christ: who always hold fast the lower life; who love the flesh more than the mind; or the mind more than the heart; or the natural affection more than the voice of conscience, self more than Christ. Oh, my friends, be sure that you have a right to the rejoicings of this day. For it says to us, "Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it."

VIII.

THE FIRST ADAM AND THE LAST.

> "*And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*"—1 Cor. xv. 45.

What was the purpose of Christ's coming to the earth? Why was the Word of God made flesh? That is a question which we cannot well help asking,—if we believe that Christ ever came to the earth, incarnate. For our minds are so made that we cannot be long satisfied without knowing the purpose of things. If any important deed has been done, which interests us much, we either think that we know, or else we ask, why it was done. But to the Christian this incarnation of Christ is the most important, and most interesting of all deeds or events: that the Son of God should humble Himself to become man, and be made flesh. Why did He do it? We cannot rest without some answer.

Now, a familiar answer to this question,—and a Scriptural answer, so far as it goes,—is that Christ came to earth to save men from their sins. The purpose of the incarnation is redemption. A very true answer, true to the spirit and to the substance of the

Gospel,—true, *i. e.*, unless it be taken for the whole answer; then, I think, it may not be so true. Not long ago I heard an able man laying it down as a sort of axiom to build up his arguments upon, that Christ came just to undo the damage of Adam's sin; *i. e.*, to put man back where he was before the Fall. Now, that way of stating the case, I think, is neither true nor Scriptural: and many practical inferences that have been drawn from it are very far from true.

Here is a man, we will say, starting out on a long journey. The first part of the path he knows, and by proper care could travel over safely. The last part is unknown to him; and for that a guide must be provided. But the traveller has hardly started on the earlier, easier part of the path, when he begins to grow careless or wilful, and so wandering from it, loses himself hopelessly among the tangled forests.

The guide comes to meet him according to appointment, but does not find him; learns then of his wanderings, traces them out, discovers him at last in his lost condition; and by infinite patience leads him back through dangers innumerable, safe to the path again, not far from where he left it. And we all give a great sigh of relief that the lost man has been found and saved; that the guide's work has been so well done. But has it been done? Has it not rather been only just begun? He has merely brought the man back to that path which he ought never to have

left. Now we must begin to talk about finishing the journey.

Here is another man who wishes to make some intricate piece of machinery. And he himself has been taught such first principles of mechanics as should enable him to begin the work; making the frame and foundation for it, perhaps, or some of the simpler parts. Then he must call in the wise inventor to construct for him that peculiar and delicate mechanism which he himself does not understand. In due time the inventor comes, and looking over that part of the work which the man was to do, finds it worthless. The good material has been almost ruined; the man stands staring hopelessly at what he has done; utterly unable even to repair his own blunders. And so the inventor's first task must be to put this part of the work in shape; to undo the injury which the man has wrought by his carelessness, or his foolish experiments. And every one is greatly pleased when this is accomplished. He has proved his skill as an inventor, we say; for he has repaired the damage: the machine is just as good as it was before the blunder was made. Yes; but is that all? How about that intricate mechanism, which was to give the whole work its value, and which the skilful inventor had promised to construct? Have we forgotten about that? Do we say that the whole work has been done as soon as the injury has been repaired?

Thus we must ask as concerns this race of ours, which has bungled so sadly over its work of building up a perfect humanity; which has wandered so far from the path appointed for its journey. Our Saviour's first task must be to undo for us the damage that we have done; to restore to its first order the work that we had thrown into ruinous disorder; to lead us back safe to the path from which we had wandered. And this was so great a task, our blunder had been so fatal, it had seemed so far beyond belief that the damage done could ever be repaired—that perhaps it has not been strange if Christians have often forgotten everything else, believing and teaching that Christ's whole work for man was to save him from sin. Nevertheless, these further questions will come up again after a while: After we have regained the path, how about the journey? After the damage has been repaired, how about finishing the machine? Suppose that man had not sinned at all, would there have been no work for Christ? After man is saved from his sin, does he need nothing more from Christ? Is it our highest desire for our human race that we should merely be put back once more at the point where Adam stood before he wandered and fell? Has the divine Son no higher place in God's scheme of creation than merely to repair the blunders of God's creatures? Now bring these questions face to face with our text, and see whether the Scriptures

do teach that Christ's whole work for man was to save him from sin. Paul says, "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit."

"And so it is written," he says: he is quoting from Old Testament Scripture. We turn back to see what he means by his quotation, and read in the second chapter of Genesis: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." That was Adam, the first man; as he came from the Creator's hand, in Paradise, before ever he had sinned, before he had been tempted; standing at the summit of the physical creation; standing erect, as if to show that he had been given dominion over all the works of God's hands; naturally lifting his gaze toward the heavens, as if to show that his course lay thitherward; and yet standing upon the earth; connected in some way with that whole process of creation which had preceded him; formed like the rest of the dust of the ground. This was the first man Adam, who, through the inbreathing of the Almighty, became a living soul. There was no sin as yet: the work was faultless as far as it had gone. But, Paul says: "It was of the earth, earthy." This man now created has a body which realizes the ideal perfection of the animal body; has also a reasonable soul, where every vague instinct of the animal crea-

tion should rise into some higher act of intelligence. Looking upon this man, you feel that you can understand now the meaning of all that has been made before. He is like the capital city, and all the roads of creation point toward him.

As we read those opening chapters of Genesis, and still more clearly as the rocks are made to tell us their story of patient development; plant, and fish, and reptile, and bird, and mammal; each order of existence foreshadowing something more perfect than itself: what was an unmeaning protuberance in the earlier, becoming a useful limb or organ in the later: so that each page of the history can be fully understood only when we read through the following chapter—as the rocks, I say, are made to tell this story of patient development, which we had before heard more briefly through the opening chapter of Genesis—we can see that God's entire workmanship with the dust of the ground properly ended when He had made man. All the converging lines have now come together. Everything made before either foreshadowed man's body, with its beauty of form, and sublimity of posture, and infinite variety of motion, and diversity of sense, and supremacy of brain—everything made before either foreshadowed this body of man, or else was prepared for his enjoyment and use. In him we see the lord of this whole earthly Paradise, fitted to name and rule all its living creatures, and to enjoy all its fruits. His coming gives completeness to all the rest.

II. But, my friends, we cannot look long upon this man Adam without feeling that as yet he has no completeness in himself. He gives completeness to the lower creation, but he has no completeness in himself. His nature is noble enough to give meaning to Paradise, but that earthly Paradise was not noble enough to give meaning to him. The hunger of his soul is not satisfied by its abundance: he is lonely among all its innumerable denizens. Was he made for no better occupation than naming the beasts and eating the fruits of the garden? "Such a piece of work as man; so noble in reason; so infinite in faculties; in form and moving so express and admirable, . . . the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals"; and yet, after all, must we not exclaim with Hamlet: "What is this quintessence of dust?" And so, too, reasons Paul in our chapter. You notice he is not talking about sin; that fact does not enter into his present argument at all. Quite apart from sin, something more was needed to give completeness to the first Adam. For that Adam, with all his splendid possibilities, is but the quintessence of dust; he is of the earth, earthy: and all who are born from him, by mere natural generation, are of the earth, earthy.

And yet we were formed to look above the earth; all the aspirations of our nature point heavenward, along a road which we cannot travel alone. This

intricate mechanism of man, even when endowed with a reasonable soul, is not yet complete; that which is to give it lasting value is yet lacking. For this man was created to hold the Spirit of God, and to dwell at the right hand of God. All these faculties, so marvellously developed, of body and mind and heart, were made to be the dwelling-place and the conscious glad instrument of the Infinite One. And then, when at length fully possessed by that eternal Spirit, what is corruptible in these faculties shall be changed to incorruption; and what is mortal to immortality. But the gift of that divine nature must come unto man by a second and higher birth. For what was born of the flesh is flesh merely; only those born of the Spirit become truly sons of God. I am repeating these familiar phrases of Scripture in order to remind you how constantly the truth is there recognized that man needs vastly more than to be saved from his sins. Quite apart from sin, a second Adam is needed, who shall be the Lord from heaven, the Son of God made man, to lead us, descendants of the first Adam, up to our final destiny.

How this full salvation would have been wrought for us, if we had not sinned, the Bible does not say. Perhaps some hint of it is given in the mystical language of Genesis, where we read of that "tree of life of which man might take and eat and live forever." Those words may give some hint of the

salvation which Christ would have brought to man in the garden by the way of innocence. But, at all events, what we are taught clearly is that, sin or no sin, man needed this gift of full salvation from the Son of God before he could enter upon his exalted destiny. Without that gift, Adam remains only a living soul, of the earth, earthy. For let me now read once more these verses from Corinthians beginning with our text, and you will notice that not one word need be changed, even if Adam had never fallen from his first estate: "And so it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. Howbeit, not first is that which is of the spirit, but that which is of the soul (that which is natural, according to our version), afterward that which is of the spirit. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is of heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Something more in that than just undoing the damage of the Fall.

III. But perhaps you will say, what is the use of these imaginary suppositions? Whatever might have been needed for an innocent Adam and his race of innocent descendants, the real Adam sinned, and we have all followed him in sin: and now this second

Adam, our Saviour, must bear the burden of our sin on the cross; and therefore to us He is the Lord who loved us and gave Himself for us; and to the end of eternity our song of praise shall be, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." Why should we trouble ourselves to ask about the salvation of such imaginary creatures as never had sinned, and needed no lamb slain for their redemption?

There is force in such questions; nevertheless it does remain important that we should grasp as much as we can of the Scriptural teaching on this subject; understanding that Christ's work for man is something greater and better than merely to undo the damage of the Fall, and I will suggest one or two reasons why this truth is important.

One reason is, that it shows the work of man's salvation to be in harmony with all God's works. I think that we have often placed needless stumbling-blocks in the way of our own and our neighbor's faith. We have sometimes tried to make it appear that all these Scriptural facts were marvellous exceptions in the course of history; when so often they are striking illustrations of the course of history. Holding this inspired teacher in our hands, we have taken almost a hostile position toward all other teachers: almost as if we dreaded and resented the discoveries of scientists and critics and historians. Some of us have almost dared say to our hearers,

"You must take your choice between this teacher, the Bible, and those teachers: for you cannot adhere to both." "You cannot," men said once, "believe with Galileo, that the earth goes round the sun, and also believe this book which makes the sun go round the earth: you cannot believe those who speak of ages of creation, and also this Moses who speaks of six days of creation." So men used to contend: but have we not all learned long since that we can believe both Galileo and the Psalmist; both Moses with his days, and the Geologist with his ages?

Well, in our time the contention takes a somewhat different shape. These other teachers are all telling of progress, ascent, or building up: from the lower to the higher, from higher to higher yet: unceasing development in this whole universe: or evolution, to use the word which has come to stand for the entire controversy. But this one inspired teacher, on the other hand, has told us the story of a fall. They spoke of beginning at the bottom and working toward the top. This speaks (so we have understood) of beginning at the top, and tumbling toward the bottom. I have heard an eloquent preacher sum up the whole discussion in these words: "They make man an educated monkey: the Bible makes him a fallen prince."

And there is undoubtedly such a contrast between many of these theories, known as evolution, and the plain teaching of Scripture. But, my friends, have we

not often exaggerated and misrepresented the contrast? According to Scripture, man is indeed a fallen prince; but, according to Scripture, he did not fall from the top. There could be no more striking statement of the true principle of development, *i. e.*, of progressive creation, than this by Paul: "Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual." Man was created of the earth, earthy; he was to be re-created in the image of the heavenly; and somewhere in that progress from the lower toward the higher, from the natural toward the spiritual, man, through his own fault, wandered and stumbled and fell. That is the teaching of Scripture; and is not that teaching in perfect harmony with all that is true in the words of these many other teachers round about us? Does it not first shed light on the mystery of those other teachings?

Why, according to any atheistical science, the highest product of evolution is man, as we now know him; this broken promise that we see; this failing endeavor; this being of infinite dreams and desires, but in himself a mere quintessence of dust:—for infidelity, that is the head of all things, that first Adam, of the earth, earthy. According to Scripture, the head of all things is Jesus Christ, and the church of His redeemed; man lifted up by an incarnation of the Eternal Son, and exalted to the right hand of

God, the Father Almighty; and bestowing also upon us His brethren the gift of an indwelling Spirit, bestowing upon us, as many as will receive, the right to become sons of God; lifting us up at last to share His own exaltation, that we may become kings and priests unto God forever. Is there any conflict between that teaching of Scripture and the lesson which they would have us learn from this visible world, the lesson of orderly development in all things; development upward, step by step, through all stages of creation, till we reach God's finest handiwork in man? Is it not rather true that man's promised salvation through Jesus Christ sheds the first clear ray of light on what would be otherwise a progress without goal, an evolution with nothing evolved, an insoluble and intolerable mystery? Yes, Jesus is, indeed, what Paul calls Him, the first-born of all creation; through whom and unto whom all things have been created.

Here is one reason, then, why we should be careful not to misrepresent the Scriptural teaching as to man's fall and redemption. For it is well to know that this spiritual work of God is not the contradiction, but the completion of all His other works. The goal of creation, that unto which all things were created, was not the first Adam, even in his first innocence; the goal of creation is this second Adam, the incarnate Son of God; and the race of mankind when at last united with Him by faith; redeemed from its

sin, and also filled with the life-giving spirit, that we also as many as receive Him, may have the right to become sons of God.

I will suggest another reason why it is important that we should understand the Scriptures in this matter—a very practical reason. This fall of man is something more than an ancient history; it is a constantly repeated personal experience.

No doubt there is a profound truth intended by the figurative language of the catechism: "All mankind descending from Adam by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression." But it is also true,—and I myself cannot but think it a more practically important truth for us,—that "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own desire, and enticed. Then when desire hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin." We do not have to go back to Genesis, my friends, to corroborate the various steps in that fall. Each of us has played for himself the part of Adam: some forbidden fruit there was, and we desired it, and dallied with our own desire, and it brought forth sin. And here we are, fallen, sinful, ashamed, afraid; and we think regretfully, longingly, of that earlier Paradise, that comparative innocence from which we have been driven out. We reach out our hands for that. Oh, that we might be restored to it; that this shame and fear might be taken away, these defiled garments washed white again.

Now, in this despairing mood we hear of Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners; who came to seek the lost and restore them; the sprinkling of whose blood will make the foulest clean. And we turn to Him, with confession and contrition and faith: "Wash me," that is our prayer, "and I shall be whiter than snow." And, my friends, I am very sure the Lord rejoices to see that temper of heart in any of us; that He will not withhold an answer to that prayer. But I fear that sometimes, even in such moments of shame and contrition, we are not ready to receive all that He wishes to give. We have only wished to be rid of this sin, to be placed back where we were before we had fallen, to have once more an untroubled conscience; to be able once more to look men squarely in the face, to be delivered from this fear of God's wrath. What we would have been if we had not sinned, that is what we want Christ to make us once more. And so when we think these prayers have been answered, and our sins forgiven; and when this belief, or else some distraction, or diversion, or even the mere passage of time, has dulled the sense of guilt within us; then we have nothing more to ask from our Saviour. Our fervency of prayer may be relaxed, for He has saved us; He has brought us back from our wandering; He has washed away our stains; and now He may leave us to go on our own way in peace.

Not that any one would ever confess such desires and thoughts even to himself; but that is, it may be, what we have really desired from Christ: ah, but that is not at all what He has desired from us, or rather what He has desired to give us. He has come as a life-giving Spirit, to breathe Himself into us: so that our life should be no longer a mere animal existence, either sinful or sinless, but should be a communing with God; our thoughts and desires reaching out toward Him; our love growing continually stronger for Him, as His love makes itself better known to us; our joy found more and more in Him: so that the infinite Spirit should become to our spiritual life what this vital air has been to the life of our flesh: so that we shall continually breathe out,—or the Spirit shall breathe itself out in prayer, making intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered; and so that we shall continually breathe in again blessed inspirations of this heavenly atmosphere. We ourselves might have been content if Christ would but wash us clean from a certain number of past offences; but He was purposing to make us new creatures; bearing the image of the heavenly, as we had borne the image of the earthy; hungering and thirsting now after righteousness, as we had hungered after the fruits of an earthly Paradise; our souls waiting for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; and finding our joy in His coming and

presence. That is something far greater, far better, is it not, than merely to be restored, cleansed from sin, to a life of innocent earthiness?

My friends, let us all try to gain juster views of what the Bible means by regeneration and salvation. Let us understand that this Christianity offered ought to complete for us the whole process of our creation; ought to pervade and control and interpret every department of our life: our study, our work, our play, our endurance of suffering, our joy;—through it all we ought to be coming into the image of the heavenly, ought to be growing up in all things into Him, which is the head, even Christ. For not only our moral nature belongs to Christ if we are His, but the whole life of our affections and of our intellect, until every thought is brought into obedience to Him; and in some sense the Bible teaches that even these mortal bodies are to be quickened through the Spirit of Christ that dwelleth in us.

Therefore, every part of us which had been formed out of the dust of the ground, earthy, and then deformed by sin, is to be transformed by the life-giving Spirit, and made heavenly. That, my friends, is the salvation which God, through Jesus Christ, has freely offered us in our sin and shame. Think of it; a wealth of salvation, incredible and inconceivable even to that sinless Adam who first dwelt in Paradise, freely offered now to us in our sin and shame. Oh, we must not

dishonor the giver by accepting less than the whole of the gift. Let us pray and work for this full-grown manhood which our Creator and Father has designed for us, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

IX.

THE COST OF CHRISTIAN USEFULNESS.*

> "*And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.*"—LUKE viii. 46.

YOU remember the incident. Jesus walking along the road, surrounded by a dense throng of people. A poor, sick woman pressing up behind, and touching the border of His garment with the hope that she might be healed, and she was healed. Jesus stopped at once, asking who touched Him, and added the words of our text. He perceived that virtue or power had gone out of Him. We must suppose that He already knew the woman's faith, because He seems not to have performed such miracles of healing except in answer to faith; but, however that may be, these words also remain true; He felt that virtue or power had gone out of Himself. He was conscious of some drain upon His own energies. A similar phrase, you remember, occurs in another passage: "The whole multitude sought to touch Him, for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all."

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* Preached in Bath, February 4, 1883; in Plainfield, May 18, 1884.

These words become very significant in view of the fact that Christ's work of healing left Him weary. Notices are frequent of His urgent demand for rest. He must flee from this multitude, across the Sea of Galilee, for a few days' repose; or up into the country about Tyre and Sidon, where none would know Him. It is the picture of a man completely exhausted, whose powers must recuperate before his work should continue. We can well understand such exhaustion when we come to know that for all this work of healing which occupied so largely the early part of His ministry, power must go out of Him.

The truth to be learned from these words is, that real benefits cost. I. First, let us pursue the subject further in connection with the work of Christ Himself. That was a great work of benefaction toward all the world; the truth now presented is that all the benefits so conferred cost Him. We are always in danger of making Christ's life a sort of acting, a theatrical display; and we are all the more in danger of doing this because of our reverence for Him as divine. If we believed Jesus to be a mere man, then His temptations and triumph over them, His prayers, His deeds of kindness, His struggles with doubt, and the sublime heroism of His death, would at least be real, and we should find great inspiration in His human example, even if otherwise He were powerless to save us. For this reason I think those who do not believe in our

Lord's divinity, have sometimes done great service to the Church through their intense admiration for His genuine humanity. It is as a man that He must first make Himself known to us; and nothing can, in the end, be more fatal to our faith, than to lose our hold on that truest and realest of all human lives by which He has come forever into the midst of us.

Our Saviour at once becomes powerless to save, if He seems to be some divine being who merely put on Him a garment of flesh, that He might, for a few years, play the part of a man; who made a show of going through the various acts of human life; passed through a dramatic and, of course, successful conflict with the devil, merely to set us an example of resistance to temptation; went through the form of saying a prayer merely to set us an example that we should pray; deliberately and needlessly went through the form of dying on the cross, that He might rise from the grave, and so teach us to die by making us sure that we may rise from the dead;—the whole performance artificial; a well-meaning pretence at the need and suffering of humanity, in order that we may be shown how to bear ourselves in such need and suffering. The trouble is, that such a showing gives no help. A struggling, sinful man at my side who actually overcomes some great temptation is more of a help to me in my struggles than some perfectly sinless being who only pretends to be tempted in order to show me how to overcome.

Now, whatever else we miss of seeing, let us at least open our eyes to the intense reality of that human life described in the four Gospels. We are told there about one Jesus, a Nazarene, who, whatever else He may have been, was through and through the most thoroughly human man that ever lived; took up into Himself most completely our human nature; and that was in part the reason why He made so deep an impression on the men of His generation, and also why His influence has continued and increased in the world ever since. Other men touch us at a few points; He touches us everywhere. We cannot get away from Him. All the social and political questions of our own day, even more than those of His day, are pervaded by His human presence and await His deep human decision. It is from this solid basis of humanity, believing Jesus the truest man that ever lived, the one altogether true man that ever lived, it is from this that one's faith may rise to the view of the God manifested in Him.

Now nothing makes Christ's humanity more evidently real to us than its limitations; His pains, His uncertainty, His weariness; His necessary use of means to accomplish ends, as watching and prayer; and the cost to Himself of these ends accomplished. So that even this miraculous power of healing, which seems to us most entirely unhuman, seems to speak of infinite reserves of force, on which He may draw

without fear of exhaustion; even that He uses at His own cost, by vast hidden effort, as one might say. Even that, perhaps, rests on His completer humanity, as well as on the divine in Him. He cured a demoniac once on whom His disciples had experimented in vain; and they asked Him why their experiments had been in vain, and He answered, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer." As if His own success sprang from His own deeper exertion rather than from some entirely different source of power. His whole work of healing, I believe, if rightly understood, does not hold Him away as an unearthly magician; but brings Him very near us all, able to heal because He partakes more completely than we of this whole human nature; able to heal also because He is willing to make cost: His blessed work for others a fearful drain upon Himself.

Our souls need healing more than our bodies; and it is for this, more peculiarly, that men have craved the help of Jesus. Nor have they looked to Him in vain. Even while He was curing their bodies, it began to be perceived that He wished to save men from their sins, and that He could save men from their sins. But at what a cost was this work accomplished! He helped sinners by living among them, eating and drinking in the midst of them, surrounding Himself with them. What an association for a being of His perfect purity; of what we may call, for want of a

better phrase, His perfect refinement of taste! That foulness of actual sin: it is easy for us to idealize those ancient sinners, and make their sins, as well as His work of salvation, a sort of stage performance; but Christ was brought close to the uncleanness, the blasphemy, the intemperance, and the reckless misery of wicked men and wicked women; and, moreover, He stood among these not as a spectator, far away in thought and feeling while near bodily; as one of us might walk, if necessary, through the vile alleys of a city, holding our breath, closing our ears almost, drawing our clothes about us to avoid contamination; not so, but by some means Christ made Himself at home with those sinners, and made them feel at home with Him; so that they recognized Him as a friend; and wretches who would have shrunk away in terror from the supposed purity of a Pharisee, did not fear to open their hearts in confession before this truly sinless Jesus: because they felt assured of His sympathy. They knew by that strangely certain knowledge of the feelings, that this man could place Himself beside them, and know the weight of their temptations, and sorrow with them in their guilt and shame: by the completeness of His human sympathy taking some of the weight of this burden from their shoulders to His own. And they did not misjudge Him.

Ah, but at what a cost had that sinless man brought Himself thus spiritually into the midst of the sinful!

These miserable ones found virtue and faith and moral strength in His presence; but it was a virtue that had gone out of Him, not leaving Him the less pure, but leaving Him sometimes, as it seems, almost beaten down, and exhausted by the spiritual effort.

He pronounced forgiveness also upon penitent sinners. Mere words, we think, perhaps; as one of us might read off a form of absolution to one who had confessed. The difference is that our absolution does not absolve; His, as sinners well knew, did absolve. They felt—many repentant sinners have felt it since—that He not only spoke their pardon, but He accomplished it. And if one asks how, the heart of Christendom has always answered by pointing to the cross. Ask what that cross means, and perhaps no two men will answer you alike: but we all know well that it means fearful cost. We know, looking upon that cross, that this virtue of forgiveness which enters into our souls came out of Him; that through sore agony of spirit, through great and utterly exhausting endeavor, through a sorrowing even unto death, He has become able to speak pardon to us.

> "We may not know, we cannot tell
> What pains He had to bear.
> But we believe it was for us
> He hung and suffered there."

That was no show performance, no feigned suffering; in Gethsemane, as well as on Calvary, there

is a terrible reality about the struggle and anguish, a reality which our hearts all feel, if our heads do make sad work in trying to account for it. We feel that there was fought out the decisive battle in this whole warfare of the human race against evil, or of the God in man against the devil in man. It is on the solid reality of that fight and triumph that the Christian Church has always built her hope.

Christ's word of pardon for any believer is not a sort of letter of recommendation, such as you might give any applicant, costing you only the effort of signing your name; but it is like the draft on your banker, which you hand to another only when you mean to transfer some amount of capital to him, which takes from you whatever it confers on him.

So the whole gracious work to which Jesus devoted His life was a work which involved fearful cost to Himself. The virtue which came upon others came out of Him. His work of healing for men's bodies, as it seems—certainly His work of healing for their souls; the association with sinful men and women, coming into knowledge of their guilt and temptation and need; winning them by sympathy, a true suffering with them of all the wretchedness of their sin; pronouncing pardon upon all who repented, and able to pronounce it and make His words good, because He, sinless, had carried off on His pure soul the burden of their guilt.

My friends, if we receive any benefits from this Christian religion—and who of us does not?—what should be our feeling toward Him who so won them for us, at such unlimited cost to Himself, yielding Himself, life and death, for us men and our salvation?

II. Now let us carry this same truth into our own relations among ourselves, the truth that real benefits cost: if we would cause any virtue or power to enter into others, it must come out of us.

This is true to a large extent even of our material gifts to the needy. Of course, from the nature of things, the money that we give away leaves so much the less in our own hands. But I mean more than that. There is a kind of charity which seems to make all parties the poorer; the opposite of true mercy, it curseth him who gives and him who takes. Such is the unloving gift of any one who from mere whim of generosity, or other unworthy motive, gives of his abundance that which is no cost to himself, no cost of privation, and no cost of personal oversight and sympathy. We must call it a piece of improbable good fortune if such gifts ever do good. Their usual result must be only increased dependence and pauperism. Money given does the most good, no doubt, when this money is the least important part of the gift; when it comes as the needful but subordinate attendant of real charity, of true sympathy and personal assistance: hence, also, the gifts of the poor

which in themselves cause privation to the giver are often especially helpful to men as well as pleasing to God.

But money is a subordinate element in all true charity, and in many cases there is no occasion for its use. How is it with the higher regions of benevolence? One duty which we owe to each other in this world of many sorrows, is consolation. Those who are crushed by disappointment or affliction need to be cheered and helped upon their feet again. And this ministry of helpfulness toward each other is committed to us all as part of our Christian duty. A simple matter it might seem to a careless observer: a few words; what is cheaper? But have we not all found that there are words and words; and those words which are cheap as to cost, are very cheap in value. The words which truly help are those which cost dear; which come from a heart filled with our sorrow: indeed, if we can be made to know that another heart is so suffering with our own, that knowledge often is consolation enough: a pressure of the hand from one will cheer you more than an hour's conversation from another.

It is seldom that our brotherly affection is strong enough of itself to bring us into such full sympathy with those who are deeply afflicted. Therefore, some past affliction of one's own is needed commonly to open his heart wide to the sorrows of another. So it

is that deep personal sorrow is often the price which those have paid who are able to minister most helpfully to others. "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation," the apostle says, "that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Every word of comfort that truly comforts, I believe, is not cheap, but dear: it has been paid for either by the speaker's own past sorrow, or by his present sharing of the other's grief.

But mere sorrow does not represent man's deepest need. If sorrow were all, probably most might stand alone without help from their fellows. Our worst need of help still comes from our sins. The world's chief need of help lies in its sin. If we desire to be helpful to our fellows or any of them, we must desire most of all to help them out of their sins. But how is this help to be rendered? It is easy to offer advice; it is easy to point out the folly and danger of sin, and to speak of the rewards of virtue. But there seems to be no connection often between our words of good counsel and those who ought to profit by them. For some reason they do not care to listen; or if they listen, it is to forget. Even telling the story of the Gospel seems often to be of little profit. Most of the sinners in Christendom have heard that story at some time in their lives; but they hear and understand not. The sacred words have no power to reach

them. We learn at last that if virtue is to enter them, it must come out of some one else. They will not truly hear the Gospel until some one speaks it, at great cost; some one who has taken upon himself the burden of their sins.

Often it may be one who has himself sinned, as they have sinned, and who is so brought into sympathy with their guilt: and is able to lead them up the path of reformation, which he himself has trodden before them. But this need not always be so. He who most perfectly bore the burden of others' guilt had never sinned at all Himself. And some of Christ's noblest followers have needed no apprenticeship of great personal sin to bring them into sympathy with the sinful about them. But in some way that sympathy must exist, if one man is to help another, if sinful men are to be reconciled to God; and certainly the Lord has committed to His disciples this ministry of reconciliation. We often hear it said truly that Christians are the world's Bible: we might say further that Christians are, and were intended to be, the world's Christ. The living servant of Christ, who has received his Lord's Spirit, who feels upon his own heart the burden of others' sin and shame, who tries at his own cost to win them back to pardon and holiness, he is the visible representative before men of Him who died on Calvary: and it is in this living man that they will first see, if they ever see at all,

that perfect Saviour who bore their sins for them. The benefit still costs.

Not that the cost is always apparent on the surface: the greater it is, the less attention it will claim for itself. Any proclamation or display of self-denial is a sign that the sacrifice is not yet complete: that the giver is not quite ready to pay the full cost. There was no sign of painful effort in the life of Jesus among sinners; if we except this often-recurring weariness, and that agony of spirit which found expression at times of very strong emotion. Usually it seemed the most natural thing in the world for Him to choose just those associates, and speak just such words as He did speak to them. And so it is with the persons who are most Christlike now, and accomplish the most of Christ's work for men. In watching them, you are not all the time made conscious of painful effort. What they do or say seems to be natural to them, and quite without exertion. No credit to them, we are tempted to think—it is no trouble to them to be good and do good: no self-sacrifice; ah! but it is because their self-sacrifice has been made so completely. The cost has already been paid without grudging, and now they seem to be always ahead of their duties, as a wise man of business keeps ahead of his debts. They have always a reserve fund of Christian force, of sympathy and moral strength. In times of spiritual panic, you have

no fears of their capital. They hold up many more about them by their own firmness. You hear little about the effort, the cost: but be very sure it has been paid. Their effort is that of the trained workman, whose strongest exertions have an appearance of ease.

Our Lord, foreseeing His own death, bade His disciples take up each a cross and carry it after Him. If any Christian in becoming thoroughly Christlike seems without this burden, be sure that it is because he has learned so willingly to bear his cross, not because it has been lifted from his shoulders. He wishes, like Christ, to go about doing good: and without grudging, with no sign of effort, he pays the cost of doing good.

III. But we ask in closing, is the Christian life, then, one of privation, of final diminution and loss? The inspiration of well-doing would be taken away, if we supposed that the man who conferred spiritual benefits upon others was left himself spiritually the poorer. But God forbid. That old contradiction from the book of Proverbs holds good here, most of all: "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth." Our Lord's well-doing was undoubtedly a drain upon Him, virtue going out of Him, bringing often great exhaustion of mind and body; and yet it was also true that this well-doing was a joy and nourishment to Him: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of;

my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." One of those impossible truths of all profoundest experience: what wearied Him was also His highest nourishment. What cost the most, enriched Him the most. We see traces occasionally of the deep joy which Christ took in His efforts for men, whenever those efforts succeeded. That this joy was so seldom manifested must have been because, before His own death, those efforts so seldom did succeed. Only a few were won even by the marvellous attraction of His presence, until the cost of His salvation had been clearly revealed upon the cross. But taking His work as a whole, we are assured that He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.

Has not the humblest imitator of Jesus begun to learn that only out of travail of soul comes any high satisfaction? Why! we gain hints of the truth even from the lower processes of bodily and mental effort. That muscular exertion which accomplishes largest results, and costs the most tissue, and brings most complete exhaustion and need of rest, is, at the same time, that which brings the fullest enjoyment with it. Or any man who works with his mind will tell us, that when his thoughts move readily and joyously, so that in a few hours he is able to do the work of days, he learns at the close that he has made the heaviest demand upon the nervous forces of the brain,

and most urgently needs rest. A student's miserable days are those when he cannot exhaust himself; when his mental bank suspends payment; when no mental virtue will come out of him. He is left none the poorer, except for a day wasted; but others are none the richer, and he himself looks back upon hours of vexation, of baffled endeavor.

So that which costs is also that which well repays the cost. So it is doubtless true, as a distinguished writer of our day has said, that "the old masters painted for joy and knew not that virtue had gone out of them"; while, on the other hand, the first great master of Christian song also said truly of his greatest poem, that it had "made him lean for many years." Any masterpiece of art has been accomplished at great cost of power,—power of body and of feeling and of thought; and yet who can doubt that its accomplishing brought the artist also his keenest joy and most enriched his power?

So it will be, I am sure, with the art of Christian living and Christian working. When most successful, it is, doubtless, most costly; there has been, and is, the freest surrender of oneself to it; surrender of one's time and strength, and personal ambition, and natural inclination and tastes; a heavy cross has been raised and carried without shrinking. The disciple has been willing to be as his Lord; he has freely submitted to the burden of others' needs and sor-

rows and sins; has endured the cross, despising the shame. If he has been a source of strength and purity to others, it is because virtue has come out of him. And yet so far as his labors avail, are we not assured that he remembereth no more the anguish for joy? Can he not say with his Master that he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied? Yes, my friends, the life of Christian effort costs much; we may be very sure of that. Without this cost, it would not be worth the living. It costs the largest price of consecration, because it is the highest masterpiece of humanity; but it is well worth the cost. We need fear no after-regret if we devote to it all our powers of body and soul and spirit.

X.

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS.*

"But Esaias is very bold."—ROM. x. 20.

IN our study of the Old Testament we have examined the authorship of the Pentateuch, the book or books of the Law of Moses. In spite of some uncertainty as to the time when those books took just their present shape, we found the fact unquestionable that this man Moses was the great lawgiver of Israel; hence that the religious history of that people was based, from the beginning, on a knowledge of God's law—on some knowledge of God's law. The obligation of righteousness, the duty owed to God, the duty owed to one's neighbor—all subsequent religious teaching in Israel may assume those obligations to be known.

Now, this evening I wish to study with you hastily all the rest of the Old Testament canon, the books from Joshua on: and then to inquire what place the prophets occupied in the religious history of Israel; or, in other words, how prophecy was related to the

* This and the two following discourses are from a series preached on "The Canon of Scripture."

Law. For the first part of our subject, since it is of such great extent, we must be content with the most general survey.

In our English Old Testament you will notice that the several books are arranged as follows: first, after the Pentateuch, all the historical books; then Job; the Psalms of David; and the writings attributed to Solomon; then all the prophets. The Hebrew order is different. After the Pentateuch come, as a second group, what they call the prophets; these include Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and then all the books that we call prophetic, except Lamentations and Daniel. The rest of the books come in a third group, which the Hebrews call Cetubim, or "writings." Modern critics generally refer to them by their Greek title, "the Hagiographa," "Holy writings."

This threefold division agrees with the words of our Lord in Luke xxiv. 44: "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms"; the Psalms being the most important of the Hagiographa, this third group. More commonly the New Testament speaks of the Old as merely the law and the prophets, ignoring the third group.

With regard to the second group, it may seem strange to us that several of the historical books should be included among the prophets. The expla-

nation of this is to be sought in the fact that these books of history were doubtless composed by prophetic authors. The institution known in Scripture as the sons of the prophets,—often referred to in our day as the school of the prophets,—an institution founded by Samuel, and revived apparently by Elijah, was the centre of the intellectual life—the literary and musical life—as well as of the spiritual life of the nation. And undoubtedly the successive historians of the people all belonged to this prophetic company, or school. Reference is made, *e. g.*, to histories of David by the prophets, Samuel, Gad, and Nathan: histories of Solomon and Jeroboam by the prophets Nathan and Iddo, etc. These separate works have all perished: but their material survives in our present books of Samuel and Kings. And it is almost certain that the writers of these present books belonged also to the class of prophets. Therefore the books of Kings, etc., came to be called prophetic; just as much so as the book of Isaiah, many parts of which, you remember, are historical.

The dates and authors of these historical prophetic books are largely unknown. And you will observe what a remarkable fact it is that these Old Testament writers seemed totally indifferent to personal fame. It was enough for them that they should contribute to the record of God's dealings with their race: their own names might be forgotten. The book of Joshua

describes the conquest of Canaan. Judges, the rapid falling away of the people from Jehovah, an apostasy and ruin which threatened to become complete except as God raised up one judge after another to check it: this period lasts some 300 years. The book of Samuel describes the great revival under that prophet, and the rise of the monarchy of David; the books of Kings, the subsequent history of the monarchy till the exile. When these several books, or perhaps we should say these several portions of this long historical work, were written, we do not know. But we are safe in calling the whole of it a prophetic work: and we do know that it was not finished till the exile; for its closing sentences tell of "the kindly treatment of the last royal descendant of David in the Court of Babylon" (Stanley, iii., p. 21). Much can be said in favor of the opinion which some hold, that the compiler of our present books of Kings was the great prophet Jeremiah.

As to the books which we ourselves call prophetic, they consist largely of the teachings of the prophets whose names they bear, committed to writing sometimes by themselves, sometimes by their associates and followers. Such a scribe or private secretary is shown us in the person of Baruch, who wrote down the words of Jeremiah (Jer. xxxvi. 4). I will classify these books roughly, according to date. First, Jonah (which might have been described under the histori-

cal books), gives an account of a prophet teaching in the northern kingdom, under the house of Jehu, about 850 B.C. Then followed Joel and Amos, also under the great house of Jehu, and Hosea, a little later; but all of them prophets of the northern kingdom of Israel.

It will be noticed that up to this time this northern kingdom, the Ten Tribes, seems to have been the chief seat of prophecy, Elijah and Elisha both appearing there. But soon after Hosea, in 720 B.C., the ten tribes are carried away by the Assyrians. And at about the same time there comes a marvellous outburst of prophecy in the south at Jerusalem, under King Uzziah and his successors, especially Hezekiah. The great prophets Isaiah, Micah, and Nahum belong to this period; and also a Zechariah, possibly the author of some parts of the much later book which now goes by that name. A little more than 700 years B.C. would be the date of this period. Then follow the obscurer names of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Obadiah, and then we come to the great prophet Jeremiah, who grew up in the reformation under King Josiah, and during whose long public life the children of Judah were carried away to Babylon. Partly contemporary with him comes Ezekiel, teaching among the exiles in Babylon. This period would be a little before and after 600 B.C.

Then at the return from the Captivity we have

Haggai, a later Zechariah, and last of all Malachi. In general these several books are a record of the teachings of the prophets whose names they bear; together with some narrative of current historical events. Many suppose, however, that the last part of Isaiah, from the fortieth chapter on, is the work of a later and nameless prophet, often spoken of now as the Evangelical prophet, and that parts of Zechariah (chaps. ix.–xiii.) are the work of a much earlier prophet, perhaps of him whom we mentioned as teaching under Uzziah.

Now I must give a few words to the third class of books found in our Hebrew Bible, the so-called Hagiographa. These are, the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. Perhaps we may conclude that the writings of this third class were not accorded by the Jews quite the same supreme authority as the Law and the Prophets. And it is to be noticed that most of them are not appealed to in the New Testament. It is not so important, therefore, that we concern ourselves about their authorship. But this remark will not apply to the Psalms, which are quoted again and again as the utterance of the Holy Ghost. Many of the Psalms come, undoubtedly, from David, who introduced them into the public worship of Jehovah; but the whole Psalter was not completed till long after his time.

As to the other books of the Hagiographa, two or three remarks must suffice. It is to be noticed that Daniel is placed here, and not among the prophets; this may support the opinion of many scholars that that book in its present form was composed much later than the exile; perhaps as late as the Maccabees, at a time when all men understood that the voice of prophecy had ceased. The prophet Daniel himself, of course, taught among the exiles in Babylon. The books of Chronicles seem to be from the same hand as the earlier part of Ezra. Some would call this the hand of Daniel, others of Ezra himself. It is to be noticed that Chronicles and Kings describe the same period of history, and sometimes in the same words; but in general the books of Kings are written from the prophetic stand-point, being written by prophets; and Chronicles from the priestly stand-point, being written when the priesthood was taking the chief prominence. The last four chapters of Ezra were certainly from his own hand, and Nehemiah was the author of most of the book which bears his name.

Now we are ready to ask the question, why these books and no others have been admitted into the canon of the Old Testament as part of the Word of God? It is not an easy question to answer; for even while we believe the men who wrote these books to have been inspired, we do not believe that the men who afterward gathered them into this collection, ad-

mitting these and excluding others, were specially inspired. Indeed, no one knows who those collectors were, or when they did their work.

Perhaps we cannot answer the question better than by saying that each book has proved its own right to stand in the canon of Scripture by staying there. Really, the same question comes up for every literature. Out of the innumerable books written in every language, who shall decide which may be handed on for the instruction of posterity? Here are dramatists without number at Athens in her golden age; what council of critics shall pick out three of them—Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides—for eternal fame? "No council of critics is needed," you answer; "works like those will look after their own immortality." Or what great synagogue of learned men has made, or is making, the canon of our English literature? Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spencer, Bacon, Milton, Dryden, and the rest. What critical authority has pronounced these works canonical and immortal? You would laugh at such a question; the books prove themselves immortal by living forever, and the most that critics can do is to try to point out the elements and causes of this immortality.

Well, so it is with the Hebrew literature. There is, it is true, that same marked peculiarity which we have noticed throughout, in that these books attribute every good thing in themselves or among the people to

God. I, for one, believe their testimony on that point, and also believe that, just as God spoke in an especial manner through their authors, so He specially guarded these precious books from destruction or mutilation. But viewing the question from its human side, I think that these particular Hebrew books proved their right to live on and be studied by posterity, just as other good books have proved it, by their own manifest superiority. Time has sifted out the chaff, and the wheat remains.

The Book of the Law stands forever as the centre and foundation of the Hebrew Scriptures; the prophets have won at last for themselves an almost equal authority. The other books, the Hagiographa, did not all secure, perhaps, quite the same universal recognition. The Psalms, however, early gained a firm place for themselves in the public service of song. As to the rest, there may have been uncertainty. The New Testament writers make no use of Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Esther, Ezra, or Nehemiah; while, on the other hand, the Septuagint included the Maccabees and other books, which we no longer acknowledge. Thus the boundary line seems somewhat uncertain. We do not know that the Jewish canon was definitely and finally settled by any authoritative council in its present form until the assembly at Jamnia, during the war with Titus, seventy years after Christ. But the judgment of

time has confirmed the decision of that assembly as substantially correct; for every succeeding generation has tested the decision for itself. I will close this part of our topic by quoting the words of the Gallican Confession, one of the great Protestant creeds: "We know these books to be canonical and the sure rule of our faith, not so much by the common accord and consent of the Church, as by the testimony and inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books" (Briggs' "Biblical Study," p. 108).

II. Now we come to the second part of our evening's study. As we have seen, the two most important divisions of the Hebrew canon, both according to its own arrangement and to the New Testament phraseology, were the law and the prophets. On a former evening we saw how the divine law of righteousness lay at the foundation of all true religious life both for Jew and Christian. The books of Moses, therefore, belong rightfully at the beginning of our Sacred Scriptures. Now, what is the significance of this second group, the prophets, who come in between the law and the Gospel?

First, we will view the question historically. We have seen that after the death of Moses, and then of Joshua and the elders that had known the great works of the Lord for Israel, the people fell away from their obedience. The law was forgotten; and through

that mournful period of the judges, there seemed great danger lest Israel would lose all knowledge of the true God, and be merged in one or more of the idolatrous nations roundabout. Then under Samuel the prophet came a great revival of patriotism and of religious fervor; and from that time on for 500 years, the prophets were the chief element of health and vitality in the national life. Samuel, Nathan, and King David himself; then Ahijah, under whose influence the northern kingdom sprang into independent life, because of the idolatry and tyranny of Solomon and his son; then Elijah, by whom the northern kingdom was won back from the fatal apostasy of Baal-worship, encouraged by the heathen Queen Jezebel; then Elisha, by whom Israel was saved from destruction by Ben Hadad of Damascus, and by whose agency the great house of Jehu was raised to the throne; Isaiah, whose word guided and sustained good King Hezekiah in his reformation from idolatry, and his heroic resistance against the Assyrians; and then Jeremiah, whose counsel, if followed, would have saved Jerusalem from destruction and the people from exile in Babylon. In each great epoch, these prophets stand out as representing the highest patriotism and piety and wisdom of the people; they were the reformers, the preachers, and the statesmen of that entire age.

But what was a prophet; what does the name

mean? In English, unfortunately, we have restricted the word to a meaning which matches only one part of the ancient office, and which does not match at all the meaning of the ancient name. By our use a prophet is "one who foretells the future." Now, it is certain that the prophets did often foretell the future; but that was by no means their prominent occupation. The Hebrew name comes from a root that means "to gush forth." The name means one through whom a divine impulse pours forth excited utterance. The Greek word προφήτης (in English, prophet,) has the similar meaning of "spokesman."

The prophet was the man inspired to speak for God—whether about the past, the present, or the future, it mattered not: what distinguished him from other men was his direct connection with the Spirit of God. Through him the voice of the living God spoke to the people; sometimes recalling and explaining to them the forgotten law; sometimes recalling and interpreting the wonderful history of their race; always rebuking them for their present sin and folly, and indicating the true path of justice and holiness; often directing their eyes forward and telling the certain results of disobedience, the certain results of faith; always holding out the promise of God's restored favor to a penitent people.

In this last aspect of his teaching the prophet be-

came frequently the foreteller of things to come. But he always stands on the great principles of God's righteousness, the principles of law as unfolded through Moses; and also upon God's gracious favor to the people, as exemplified in all their past history: standing on that basis of known fact he pours forth his denunciations, his warnings, his entreaties, his gracious promises.

But now a little more in detail as to the religious teachings of the prophets. What strikes any one, at a first reading, is their exaltation of the moral principles of God's law above mere ceremonial forms. Samuel cries out to Saul: "To obey is better than to sacrifice." Amos says: "I hate your feast-days—and your meat-offerings—but let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Hosea, in words afterward quoted by our Lord: "I desired mercy and not sacrifice." Isaiah: "Your new moons and appointed feasts my soul hateth; cease to do evil, learn to do well; undo the heavy burdens; let the oppressed go free." Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Tremendous teaching, and as true and valuable for our day as for their own. A man thinks he can cover up a dishonest trade by a gift to a missionary society; or an impure life of sensual indulgence by occasional fasting and prayer; or some injustice or neglect or malice toward his fellow-men, by more fervent wor-

ship toward God; but these ancient preachers of righteousness, thundering forth their warnings and denunciations, disturb that dangerous self-deception. "To obey is better than to sacrifice." "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

The inevitable result of such teaching, such deep unfolding of the law, was to produce in Israel a deeper consciousness of sin. The law of Moses itself has shown that people the difference between right and wrong; but now the prophet, interpreting the law, and revealing these eternal principles of righteousness under the changing garments of ceremony, first makes Israel see the dreadful hatefulness of wrong, and also first fully awakens the conscience of the people to their own sinfulness. Left to themselves they almost fancied that they were keeping the law. Just observe the multitude of their sacrifices, their burnt-offerings, their incense, their new moons and Sabbaths, their calling of assemblies. What a righteous nation they are! But the prophet cries out: "These things are an abomination unto me; when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." By enforcing, then, the spirituality of the law, the prophet awakened the people to a vivid sense of sin.

But he carried this awakening of conscience still further, by recalling and interpreting to them their own national history, holding up against the sinful-

ness of the people the marvellous favor of their God. God calls His people to a reasoning with Himself: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me." "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me; the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." And that other passage from Isaiah, which has been noticed on a former evening: "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

And in this connection arises that wonderful figure employed by so many of the prophets to express God's condescending love for Israel, the figure of betrothal. The covenant into which God entered with His people at Sinai was a covenant of marriage: and hence to all its other sins this disobedient nation has added the shame of an unfaithful wife. "I remember," saith the Lord, "the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness." "Turn, O backsliding children, ... for I am married unto you." "I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness." "For thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband."

Thus the prophets delight to dwell upon God's love and forbearance and tenderness toward His disobedient people, toward His unfaithful bride; until at last they who had been proud and confident in their own righteousness are driven to confess: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Then from this sense of sin and shame the prophets are able to lead the people to a humble dependence upon the gracious promises of God: and that dependence is faith. "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. . . . I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins"; "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee" (Is. xliii. 22, 25; xliv. 22). Yes, as St. Paul declares in the words of our text, Isaiah is very bold in affirming God's long-continued goodness to a disobedient and gainsaying people.

These, then, are prominent elements of the prophetic teaching; an unfolding of the moral and spiritual principles of God's law; the enforcing of those principles upon the conscience of the people by the review of God's goodness to them, so that they at last should confess their sin and shame; and then the declaring of God's redeeming and pardoning love, that Israel, no longer confident in themselves, may find hope in God.

But this last thought leads us to another feature of the prophetic teaching, in some respects most wonderful of all. Israel has been sinning against God's grace, breaking His covenant, transgressing His law, frustrating His kind purposes: and yet God will not suffer His purposes to be finally broken through: He will remember His word which He spake to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And so these prophets are always men of the future (our own misunderstanding of the name rests on this basis of truth). Their golden age is not back, in the days of Abraham, or of David; but forward, in that time when God shall visit and redeem His people. Israel broke his former covenant; they transgressed that law written on tables of stone; but "the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. xxxi. 31, 33).

And by what means, by what kind of Saviour, shall God work out this salvation? I do not believe that the prophets could have answered clearly: but they do offer marvellous fragments of an answer. Now it is the Son of David, "the anointed one, who shall judge the people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment" (Ps. lxxii.). Now it is a child born unto us, "whose name shall be called

Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Is. ix. 6). Now it is a son born of a virgin, "whose name shall be called Immanuel" (Is. vii. 14). Now it is the servant of God, "whose visage is marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men"; "who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities"; "who was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and opened not His mouth" (Is. lii. liii.). Now it is a conqueror coming from Edom, "glorious in his apparel, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save; one who had trodden the wine-press alone" (Is. lxiii.). Such are the glimpses which the prophets offer of the coming One, by whom God will visit and redeem His people. And to some extent the people understood the promise. Losing confidence in their own strength, they learned to cherish the hope of this deliverer whom God would send, the anointed one, the Messiah.

With that Messianic promise fully spoken, the mission of prophecy was ended, the voice of prophecy ceased.

That was historically, then, the work of the prophets for Israel. But, my friends, has not the thought been rising in your minds that in all these things the long history of Israel shows itself a type of every man's life? Has not each one of us heard at the outset that voice of Moses, of the law? Right and wrong,

we all have some sense of it, for that sense stands at the beginning of moral agency. A voice makes itself heard within, possibly before we have ever learned the meaning of human speech, and says: "Thou shalt do this: thou shalt not do that." But as yet this law occupies little space in our thoughts; for we suppose that we are obeying it well enough; we expect to obey it, and to be justified in our obedience.

But soon the discipline of experience, and the deeper teachings of this prophetic book of Scripture, or of good men, God's modern prophets, convince us that we have failed to obey; that we have fallen short of that righteousness; that we are sinful and needy and lonely. And so we are made to long for some one who will take away our sinfulness, and purify our hearts, and satisfy our loneliness, and meet all these hungerings of the soul. In other words, the prophet has spoken, and has set us looking for a Messiah.

But will He come? that is another question. Shall we believe the prophet? Not very heartily, I fear, so long as his promise remains unfulfilled. If you should cut the New Testament out of our Bibles, and take just these older Scriptures of the Jews; the law and the prophets and the Psalms; not many of us Gentiles would be able to believe them inspired of God. A few perhaps, here and there; about as many proselytes as were gained from heathen nations before the coming of Christ. But the great world would

never be convinced. We should wonder at those books; burdened by our sense of guilt and need, we should often read those promises, and wish they might be true. But believe them?—a very different matter. My friends, the reason why these Hebrew Scriptures are so rapidly winning the nations to faith, is because their promises have been fulfilled. It is the vision of that Christ who has come, that Immanuel, God with us, which has begun to convert the world to a belief in this Word of God. Our sure faith begins with the fulfilment: and so the critical study of the Bible, which comes last, according to the order of the books, is by all means the first in vital importance,—the study of those books of the New Testament which have preserved among men the knowledge of His actual coming, the coming of that Jesus which is called Christ.

I shall hope soon to continue with you that more important department of our study. Ah! but we must not, we need not wait for these tedious processes of study to be completed before we begin to believe. Have you found Him, this Jesus of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write? If you have, thank God. If you have not, then look upon Him, for He has come; He has opened the heavens to man; He has brought the forgiveness of sins; He has written God's law in multitudes of hearts; He is among us here, inviting our faith and

love. It is in the light of His revelation that we have been studying those ancient prophecies. And have we not partly recognized His voice speaking through them? Even the least believing of us, have not our hearts burned within us while He has talked with us, and opened to us the Scriptures?

XI.

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS.

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us."—LUKE i. 1.

LAST Sunday we examined the origin of all the books of our New Testament except the three Epistles of John, the four Gospels, and the Acts. With these exceptions, as it appeared, our New Testament books were written before the year 70 A.D.: all but three of Paul's Epistles, and also the Epistle of James, coming before the persecution by Nero in 64; while Paul's remaining Epistles to Timothy and Titus, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistles of Peter and of Jude, and the Revelation of John, were written after that persecution, but before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70.

That date brings us now to the formation of a group of books, more interesting in some respects than any others in the New Testament, more interesting than any others in the world—those four Gospels which tell us nearly all that we know of the life and words of Jesus Christ Himself. It is not hard to

see why these historical books of the New Testament, though now so unspeakably precious to us, were among the last to be written. They relate facts which became commonly known to the believers of that earliest time in another way, by the spoken narrative of the apostles, constantly repeated everywhere in all Christian assemblies. The parables, the sermon on the mount, the last supper, the story of the betrayal—these were all household words in that first household of faith. Therefore the need of writing was felt first, not in connection with the historical facts, but in connection with the application of Christianity—questions of practical conduct, such as marriage with unbelievers, the eating of meat offered to idols, the exercise of Christian liberality, etc. The first Christian writings were called forth in answer to such questions of conduct, or else in answer to those deep questions of doctrinal belief which the known facts of the Gospel must always suggest to the mind of men. But the facts themselves as yet rested on no written testimony: they were the common property of the Church, being related everywhere by apostles, and lovingly repeated after them by all believers.

But that spoken Gospel spread through the world with great rapidity. Within a few years there were many more churches than apostles: and the distances separating these churches rapidly increased. At first the problem had been only to instruct a few compa-

nies of believers in Judea and Samaria. But now, after twenty or thirty years, these Christian companies are found in all the more important towns bordering the Mediterranean, as far as Italy. Thus the demand for apostolic witnesses was fast exceeding the supply.

But, moreover, this increase of demand was even attended by a diminution of the supply. James, the son of Zebedee, had been martyred by Herod long ago: now probably James, the Lord's brother, was put to death; and soon came the horrors of Nero's great persecution; and closely following it the martyrdom of Peter and of Paul. And still the Lord delayed His coming: and still, for her knowledge of Him, the Church depended, as at the first, upon this testimony of these men who had walked with Him while He walked the earth. And now these witnesses, all well advanced in years, were falling asleep in such quick succession. We can understand, can we not, the apprehension which would seize the Christians, and especially the Christian teachers of that younger generation. We can hear their anxious inquiry: "What if all the Fathers should fall asleep, and Christ still delay His coming, and we be left to our own uncertain memory of what they have related to us, and to our own ill-established authority for instruction?"

Now we find clear traces of just such solicitude in

the writings which remain to us from that time. Remember that probably none of our Gospels had yet been written, and then read the first chapter of Peter's first Epistle: "That the trial of your faith might be found unto praise at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom not having seen ye love; . . . . wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end. . . . . All flesh is as grass, but the word of the Lord endureth forever: this word which was preached unto you." What fatherly care for them breathes through those solemn sentences! Or still more clearly in his second Epistle: "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance; as long as I am in this tabernacle, I stir you up by putting you in remembrance. I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance."

Perhaps in the very same year with this second Epistle we find Paul writing to Timothy: "Shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness: who have erred and overthrown the faith of some: in the last day perilous times shall come. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned."

Or again we turn to that other letter of this same time, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and there we read: "Remember them that had the rule over you, which spake unto you the word of God; and considering

the issue of their life, imitate their faith." From all sides this same tone of anxiety, the authorized witnesses to Jesus, these human channels of the word of God, are passing away. The Church suddenly awakes to her urgent need of some perpetual witness, of some more enduring embodiment for this last and best word of God, this Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then to supply that need, men began to take pen in hand and to write down in enduring form what they had before been content merely to hear and to speak. We are safe in affirming that this impulse to put a record of the life of Christ into writing made itself felt very noticeably in that last period which we have reached, between the years 65 and 70, and also that this was a general impulse; the common and urgent need impelling many at the same time to the same undertaking. For Luke, in the opening sentence of his Gospel, the passage taken for our text, says (Rev. Version): "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." You see, many had made this same attempt to put into writing the narrative of Christ learned from the apostles.

Among those written Gospels which Luke had seen we may quite probably include our own Gospel of Mark; but certainly neither of the others that we now

possess, neither Matthew in its present form, nor John.

These many records seem to have passed away quickly, being supplanted by the three completer and more authoritative writings which we now possess, the so-called Synoptical Gospels, by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The question now faces us, when and how did these three Gospels come into being? The question has proved a somewhat difficult one, because of the peculiar relation of these three books to each other. The problem is this: here are three books whose sentences in many passages are so nearly identical, that one author would seem to have copied from the other: but whose statements in other passages are so very different that each author must be considered ignorant of the other narrative. For instances of resemblance take the parables of the new piece in the old garment, and the new wine in the old bottles, which are almost word for word the same in all three Gospels (Matt. ix. 16, 17; Mark ii. 21, 22; Luke v. 36–38); or the familiar passage beginning, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself" (Matt. xvi. 24–26; Mark viii. 34–37; Luke ix. 23–25).

As an example of the differences, notice the very different connections in which Matthew and Luke introduce many of our Lord's best known discourses; or the different accounts of His nativity, when Matthew seems to think that Joseph and Mary had previ-

ously lived in Bethlehem, and changed their residence to Nazareth because of Herod's cruelty; while Luke is aware that they had previously lived in Nazareth, and had gone up to Bethlehem to be enrolled, while he, in turn, seems ignorant of the murder of the innocents, and the flight into Egypt. We believe that both accounts are true; but I think any candid reader will admit that neither of these writers seems to have known all the facts related by the other. Now, it might be easy enough to account either for these differences among the Gospels, or for their resemblances; but every one must recognize the difficulty of accounting at the same time for both the differences and the resemblances.

There have been two attempts at an explanation which are worthy of notice: one, that there was a written Gospel older than any of ours, and copied to some extent by each of these writers; which theory goes by the name of Eichhorn, who first propounded it: while the other explanation has made much of that spoken narrative which, as we have seen reason to believe, took shape among the earliest disciples at Jerusalem under the immediate oversight of the apostles. Our three evangelists all being familiar with that common oral narrative, and at the same time possessing each some independent means of information, might, it is supposed, have produced just the resemblances and differences which we find in their works. Now,

Luke's words in our text make it seem probable that both these forms of explanation are partly true. The oral tradition was a common possession through the Church; while there had also been various attempts older than these Gospels, to write that oral tradition down in definite and permanent form; with which attempts Luke, at least, confesses himself familiar.

Bearing in mind these difficulties of the problem, we ask again what can be known, or fairly inferred, as to the origin of our three Gospels? I will speak first of Mark, which is now commonly supposed to be the oldest of the three. Papias, whom we have mentioned before as living early in the second century, declares that Mark, having become the recorder of Peter's words, wrote down accurately, though without regular order, what he recollected of the sayings and deeds of Christ. Justin Martyr, of about the same date, quoting a sentence from Mark, asserts that it is found in the memoirs of Peter. Universal tradition confirms these statements, and justifies us in believing that Peter's teachings were written down by Mark: the John Mark, in whose mother's house at Jerusalem the disciples were gathered praying for Peter, when he interrupted them by knocking at the door: the John Mark over whom Paul and Barnabas quarrelled, because Paul thought it not good to take with them one who had turned back from the work on their earlier missionary journey: the Mark of

whom Paul wrote many years afterward to Timothy: "He is profitable to me for the ministry," having learned by that time that he was a true "fellow-laborer": the Mark of whom Peter also in his first Epistle speaks as "my son." This was the man who, from his intimate association with Peter, was able to record Peter's testimonies to the works and words of Christ.

As to the date of this writing, there is no good reason for doubting the oldest tradition, that recorded by Irenæus, which declares that Mark wrote it after the death of Peter. There seem to be indications in the language of the Gospel itself, that the destruction of Jerusalem had not yet been accomplished, though it was hastening. Our three Gospels all dwell at great length on Christ's predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem, proving that that topic was near enough to fill a very large place in the minds of writers and readers (you remember that John's Gospel, written many years afterward, omits those predictions altogether). But while the language of Matthew and Luke in several places seems to indicate that the fall of the Holy City was just past, and its awful details familiar (Matt. xxii. 7; Luke xix. 43, 44), and that the times of the Gentiles were now to be fulfilled (Luke xxi. 24): the language of Mark, on the other hand, seems to imply that these awful events were just coming. "The fig-tree was even then putting forth leaves" (xiii. 28), they must know that sum-

mer was nigh. "Let him that readeth understand." Taken in connection with the statement which we have heard from Irenæus, the phraseology of this 13th chapter of Mark makes it very probable that this Gospel was written in the year 69 or 70, at the time when the Roman armies were gathering about Jerusalem.

The language of the Gospel confirms also another ancient tradition, viz., that it was written in Rome and for Romans. We may conclude, then, that soon after the martyrdom of Peter, his spiritual father, John Mark carefully committed to writing the well-remembered testimonies of that great apostle. May it be that Peter himself, before his death, had suggested this work to his beloved disciple; and that we are thus to understand those words which I have already quoted from the second Epistle of Peter: "Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance"?

It should be said that the concluding verses of the last chapter of Mark's Gospel, from the 9th verse on, do not appear in the oldest MSS., and were probably added by some later writer: also that many suppose the nameless young man mentioned in the 14th chapter, who followed Jesus at His arrest, and then fled, leaving his linen garment in their hands, to have been none other than the evangelist Mark himself.

We come now to the Gospel which stands first in our Canon, and which goes by the name of the apostle Matthew. What can we learn as to its origin? You will observe that the Gospel itself makes no claim as to its own authorship; and in this respect the three earlier Gospels are alike, and all differ from the fourth, which expressly claims to have been written by the disciple whom Jesus loved. The first three are anonymous, unless the titles placed before them are taken as part of the original book: "Gospel according to Matthew, according to Mark," etc. Still this title to Matthew is found in the oldest existing MSS.; and it corresponds also with the most ancient traditions, which declare that the earliest Gospel written was by the apostle Matthew.

But here we encounter a difficulty: our Matthew is a Greek writing, like all the other books of the New Testament; and most scholars have been satisfied that it was never anything else—*i. e.*, our Greek Matthew offers many proofs that it is an original work, not a mere translation; but that same ancient tradition, which affirms confidently that the earliest Gospel written was by the apostle Matthew, affirms with equal confidence that he wrote it in Hebrew. The oldest testimony remaining is from Papias, whom we have already heard from on other subjects, and who declares that "Matthew wrote the sayings [meaning the sayings of our Lord] in the Hebrew dialect,

and each man translated them as he was able." Later writers of that period confirm this statement of Papias. It should be said that what he means by Hebrew is the Aramaic, the dialect akin to Hebrew spoken by the Jews of Palestine at that time, and the language in which our Lord Himself had been accustomed to speak.

The questions to be answered, therefore, are: What has become of that Aramaic Gospel? and by what right is our Greek Gospel attributed to Matthew? We may never be able to answer with absolute certainty; but I will give you such facts as seem to be making themselves clear. Irenæus says that Matthew wrote when Peter and Paul were (Weiss' "Life of Christ," p. 38) preaching the Gospel and founding the Church at Rome; that would imply a date between 65 and 68. Eusebius says that Matthew, when he departed from Palestine, bequeathed his Gospel to the Hebrews as a substitute for his oral preaching. But we may suppose that the apostles left Palestine at the outbreak of the war against Rome, which was in 66. We have also learned from Papias that Matthew wrote the sayings in Hebrew. Hence we conclude that about the year 66 or 67 Matthew wrote his Aramaic Gospel, which consisted quite largely of the collected discourses of our Lord.

Then, at some later time, some other Jewish writer, having access also to other sources of information,

very likely to our Gospel of Mark, transferred the substance of Matthew's work into Greek, adding here and there from these other sources. It was not a strict translation; and yet the older work had been so thoroughly incorporated in the new, that the old was afterward suffered to pass out of use, and at last out of existence, while the name of Matthew was transferred to the new. This Greek Gospel was still designed for Jews, but for Jews living away from Palestine, not accustomed to the Aramaic language, and not very familiar with the manners or the topography of the Holy Land. The date of this Greek work would be not long after 70 A.D., not very much later than Mark. This view, with some modifications, is now held by the great English scholar Westcott, and by the great German scholar Weiss.

It is interesting to notice, even in this secondary Greek Gospel, what seem like faint traces of the handiwork of Matthew the publican. This Gospel, for one thing, is the only one which gives (x. 3) him that title. As if with the silence of modesty, it omits the story of Zacchæus, the publican whom Christ honored; and also the parable of the penitent publican; but it does contain Christ's saying, nowhere else recorded, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Our Greek Gospel also resembles that Aramaic original in being largely devoted to the collected discourses of Christ.

We pass now to the third Gospel, that according to Luke; or it will be better to take the Gospel and the Acts together as two volumes in one historical work. For studying this work we possess the advantage of the formal introductory sentence, in which the author declares the sources and method and purpose of its composition. The author does not state his own name; but since the time of Irenæus tradition has unanimously identified him with the Luke mentioned in Paul's epistles—"the beloved physician," as Paul calls him. It is interesting to notice that in the two other references, his name is associated with that of Mark. "Marcus, Lucas," and several others "send salutations to Philemon"; while Paul writes to Timothy, "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark and bring him with thee." It is supposed also that in the second Epistle to the Corinthians (viii. 18), where Paul says, "We have sent with (Titus) the brother whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the churches," he refers to Luke; for the ancient subscription to that second epistle declares that "it was written from Philippi by Titus and Lucas."

Luke's name occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, but we gain very interesting information about him from the book of the Acts. You may have noticed that the language of that narrative changes back and forth several times between the

third and first persons. Now, wherever the first person is used, we know that Luke himself was one of the company. By this means we are informed that he joined Paul at Troas in the second missionary journey (xvi. 10) just after his Macedonian vision, and accompanied him to Philippi (about A.D. 51). Here they separated (xvii. 1). But we find them coming together again at this same place some seven years later (xx. 5). And thence Luke accompanies Paul in his last journey to Jerusalem, and in his voyage to Rome. From these indications we know that Luke was a Gentile Christian, a physician, a fellow-laborer with Paul, and, therefore, in sympathy with his general views of doctrine. We know also that he possessed more thorough command of the Greek language than the other New Testament writers, the opening sentence of his Gospel being a true classical period.

As to the date of writing, many scholars formerly reasoned that the Acts must have been written about the time when its narrative ends—with Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (about 63 A.D.), while the Gospel must be several years older. But this opinion seems not well founded. We may rather conclude that our historian ended the narrative of the Acts abruptly at that point, because it was not safe to continue. The narrative brings us down almost to the frightful persecution under Nero; to have con-

tinued a history of that persecution would have been to tempt the Roman Government to new atrocities.

Even at a much earlier period, before any persecution had been offered, we can see in the purposely obscure language of 2d Thessalonians how careful the Christians were not to compromise themselves with the Roman Government. "Only he who now letteth will let," Paul says, "until he be taken out of the way" (ii. 7); as if to say: "You know what I mean by these words, but others may make of them what sense they can." But how much greater the need of caution when the fury of persecution had already burst forth. As Canon Farrar says ("Early Christianity," p. 46): "The Jew and the Christian who entered on such themes could only do so under the disguise of a cryptograph, hiding his meaning from all but the initiated few in such prophetic symbols as those of the Apocalypse. In that book alone we are enabled to hear the cry of horror which Nero's brutal cruelties wrung from Christian hearts."

Thus there was reason enough why the narrative of the Acts should end abruptly just where it does end, even though it might be written at a much later date. And many considerations render it almost certain that this third Gospel was written, in fact, a little after the destruction of Jerusalem; later than Mark, probably later even than our Greek Matthew, some-

where between 70 and 80 A.D. The book of the Acts was evidently written after the Gospel.

As to the aim and the readers of this Gospel, it was written by a Gentile and for Gentiles; while personal traces of the author, the beloved physician, may appear in his use of technical terms for diseases, and in the saying which he alone records, "Physician, heal thyself." We noticed in the first Gospel what may be taken as personal traces of Matthew the publican; while the second Gospel, in its vivid descriptions, especially in its accurate knowledge of matters pertaining to the sea, seems to give an echo from the voice of Peter the fisherman.

Now, a little more generally as to the several contents of these three books. Mark, the briefest, and, as we have seen reason to believe, the earliest; written by a Jew, but for the Romans, and reflecting the personality of Peter, who from the first had partly ministered to Gentiles, presents Jesus in the simplest way as the Son of God, the doer of mighty works, the founder of a divine kingdom on earth.

Matthew, written by a Jew and for Jews, presents Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, the son of David; constantly calls attention to the fulfilment of prophecy in the events of His life; traces His descent from David and Abraham; dates His birth by the reign of Herod, King of the Jews. While Luke, written not only for Gentiles, but by a Gentile and a fellow-

laborer with Paul, presents Jesus as the Saviour of the world; traces His descent from Adam; dates His birth by the reign of Augustus, emperor of the world; dwells especially on the teaching of God's love for sinful men. Those wonderful parables, the two debtors, the good Samaritan, the lost piece of money, the prodigal son, are found in Luke only; also the parable of the self-righteous Pharisee and the penitent publican, "who went down to his house justified rather than the other." We can well understand how the associates of Paul should have cherished those particular parables most carefully. We may also notice that Luke's narrative of the Lord's Supper corresponds most closely with that given by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. Taking the third Gospel and the Acts together, we have a history of that preaching of salvation which began with the life of Christ in Palestine, but which was carried thence into all the world.

I have spoken of these Gospels as written severally for several different classes of readers:—Mark especially for the Church at Rome,—Matthew for the Jewish Christians—the original Aramaic for those in Palestine; the later Greek transcript for the converts among the Jews of the dispersion,—Luke for the Gentile churches founded by Paul. But with the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple, and the enforced cessation of sacrifice, those reasons which

had held the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians apart passed away. Thus, in the words of Weiss, "Early in the second century we see how the Gospel of the Jewish Christians, together with that of the Gentile Christians, and along with the Mark-Gospel which lies at the foundation of both, were a common possession in the great collective church."

We have still remaining one group of writings to examine, the later works of that disciple whom Jesus loved, and who was spared to the Church for many years after all the other apostles had passed away. That topic will demand an evening to itself.

But as we recall now the course of our study hitherto, must we not thank God that He has preserved to us through the ages this clear and many-sided picture of Christ's ministry? Anxious Christians have been troubled not a little sometimes because the view was so many-sided; because our three witnesses do not tell their story in just the same words. Matthew tells us that Jesus healed two blind men, as He was going out of Jericho: and Luke would have it that He healed one as He was going into Jericho: while Mark's story differs somewhat from both. Let us thank God, I say, that the pictures are different; that different witnesses have recorded truthfully their various impressions, as they remembered them; that so by these varying accounts the earthly ministry of Christ may be reproduced before us distinctly and

completely, almost as if we saw with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears.

But remember that in God's world great privilege means always accountability. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago." Those words might be spoken to the inhabitants of many a modern city with still greater emphasis. For by the clear testimony of these books, and by the accumulating experience of Christian ages, our own opportunity of understanding and accepting the word of Christ is better than that of His ancient hearers. What shall be said to us, then, if we leave the dust to gather on these sacred volumes; or if we merely open them now and then from habit, to read, without thought or feeling, some specified portion? As if the Lord Himself were teaching in our streets, and we could not find time or patience to hear Him through?

No, we have been learning about those kind providences of God by which these books were written, and have been preserved for our instruction; and I hope that this study may dispose us to value them more highly; to search them as for hid treasure; to dig into them for that foundation on which our faith and our life-work may be firmly established. The Gospel being furnished, it is for us to study and to know whom we

have believed; to know also what the will of the Lord is. Having this opportunity to learn, we may be expected to know. "I write unto thee," Luke continues in his preface, "most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed."

XII.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

> "*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing, ye might have life through His name.*"—JOHN XX. 31.

WE are now to study the fourth Gospel, and those three Epistles which also go by the name of John. Every reader of the Gospels must have felt that the fourth stands apart from the rest. The other three differ among themselves in some minor details; still, if I should read any of their chapters at random, probably not one in ten of you could tell from which Gospel I was reading. But a chapter, or even a single verse from John, generally identifies itself at once. Not much study is needed to show that this peculiarity of manner is attended by striking peculiarities of matter: this fourth evangelist not only tells his story in a different way, but we might almost think that he was telling a different story. The others tell us of a mission in Galilee, interrupted only when Jesus went up to Jerusalem for that last Passover, at which He was crucified. John tells us of a mission whose prominent scenes from the very

first were most of them in Jerusalem, while Christ's work in Galilee might seem to have been brief and comparatively unimportant.

Moreover, not only the field and duration of Christ's ministry, but even the style of His teaching, has been changed. His sayings, as we read them in the earlier Gospels, have been well compared to "strings of pearls, every pearl by itself, and only joined together by a thought common to all." But in John we find long, connected, profound discourses, carefully elaborating some one truth by a long process of discussion. The graphic parables have given way to mysterious allegories. Thus, from the earliest times, readers of the Gospels have felt that the fourth differed strangely from the other three.

Another strange fact which also claims our attention is the difference between this Gospel of John and the Revelation; the Revelation, that book of wrath, in every word of which we seem to hear speaking the Son of Thunder, who wished to call down fire on a certain Samaritan village and destroy them, as Elias did; the Gospel, which founds itself, as one might say, on the assertion that "God so loved the world." For these two reasons,—because the fourth Gospel differs so widely from the other narratives of Christ's ministry, and also because the fourth Gospel differs so widely from that Revelation which professes to have been written by the same

apostle John; therefore, skeptical scholarship for the last generation or so has denied that this fourth Gospel could have been written by John, or by any other witness of Christ's life: affirming that it was rather a doctrinal treatise against the Gnostic heresy, and composed late in the second century.

Really, my friends, this has been for some time the burning question of Biblical controversy. Once prove that a personal follower of Christ wrote this fourth Gospel, and you overthrow without another word the larger part of all that has been said or written against Christianity for the last half century. Now, you will remember that in our study of a few weeks ago, we saw how the discovery of new MSS. and all the other progress of critical investigation has forced back the date of this, as of the other Gospels, further and further toward the apostolic age. So far as external evidence was concerned, therefore, we felt ourselves justified in leaving controversy aside, and accepting these books for what they profess to be, and what the Church has always supposed them to be. Really, the divergence of this fourth Gospel from the others is no argument against it; but, on the other hand, a very strong proof that the Church knew it to be the work of the apostle: for how else could the churches of that earliest age have accepted without question, —as we now know that they did accept,—a Gospel which differed so widely in many respects from the

older Gospels in which they had all been instructed? The only explanation is, that this last Gospel brought them the unquestionable testimony of John himself.

We feel justified, therefore, by historic evidence, in confidently attributing this fourth Gospel, and also the first Epistle, to the hand of the apostle John. The external evidence to the second and third Epistles is comparatively slight; which, however, need not surprise us, since, being addressed to individuals, they would not be so quickly circulated among the churches.

Who was this apostle?

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. They were among those who gathered about the Baptist when he began to baptize in the Jordan. It was John and Andrew who, hearing the Baptist say of Jesus, "Behold the lamb of God," immediately followed Jesus. There seems good reason for supposing that Salome, the mother of James and John (Matt. xxvii. 56; Mark xv. 40; John xix. 25), was the sister of Mary; which would make these two young men cousins of our Lord. At all events, they and Peter were allowed a peculiar intimacy with Jesus. On certain most important occasions, as the Transfiguration, the raising of the daughter of Jairus, and the scene in the Garden, these three alone were permitted to come with Him.

Now, in the case of Peter, all the Gospels would

justify such prominence; for that man, by natural force of character, and by the impetuosity of his faith, placed himself foremost among the twelve. But the first three Gospels might hardly account for the special favor shown to John. On the only occasions where we find him doing anything to justify the prominence of his name, he is reproved by Christ: once when he reported: "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us, and we forbade him"; again, when he and James "would have called down fire on the Samaritan village because it would not receive them"; and, again, "when they and their mother came asking that they might sit one on His right hand and one on His left in His kingdom." The narrowness, the fierceness, and the ambition revealed in these three instances, would hardly explain the special favor which Christ continually showed to this apostle.

And yet, even after the death of Christ, this John still enjoys the same sort of special consideration among the disciples. Peter and John always appear side by side in service and in suffering and in confession: this, although we are never told that John actually did anything, or said anything. More than fourteen years afterward, when Paul went up to Jerusalem, he found John, with Peter and with the other James, still recognized as pillars (Gal. ii. 9). Thus we learn clearly enough, from various sources, that

John was an honored and influential man among the twelve: but we might be greatly puzzled to say why he was so.

The mystery is solved at once when we open this fourth Gospel. With infinite delicacy, without once mentioning his own name, the writer here lets us know that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. There was a peculiar tenderness of mutual affection between this man and Jesus; tacitly recognized, though perhaps not understood by the other apostles; which, even without any of the more active manifestations of service, held this disciple always near his Lord. It was a tenderness of love not often disturbed by speech, unless to flash forth in anger against those who would injure his Lord; or in jealousy against those who might have thought to supplant him in the Lord's affection. Otherwise, this man remained a silent, yet a most influential member of the apostolic company—an influential member then and afterward. For when Peter is about to heal the impotent man in the temple, the historian is careful to add: "and Peter fastening his eyes upon him, with John"—that silent participator in the miracle by no means to be overlooked. Some one has said that "Peter may fitly be called the lover of Christ, John the lover of Jesus: accordingly that the Lord commended His Church to the care of Peter; but His mother to the care of John."

Some time after the destruction of Jerusalem, as tradition informs us, John came to Ephesus, where he spent the remainder of his life, dying a very old man, after the accession of Trajan in 98. The other apostles had long since passed away. That fierce conflict with a Judaizing party in the Church, which embittered Paul's life, and often threatened to split the Church itself in two, had been ended by the destruction of the temple, and the forcible overthrow of the entire Jewish system. The expectation of the immediate end of the world, which had stimulated and disturbed the earlier Christians, was now growing fainter.

But now the purity of the faith was threatened from another quarter; by a kind of mystical philosophy which began to invade the churches, "the knowledge," as it called itself, "Gnosis"; developing a little later into the Gnostic heresy. This Gnosis was a strange anticipation of certain philosophical and religious notions of our own day, which we associate with the name of Hegel. The Gnostics differed much among themselves; but the one idea which pervades all their dreamy meditations is of a heavenly æon—logos they sometimes call it—an emanation from the unknown and unapproachable God; this heavenly æon coinciding sometimes with the man Jesus, but having nothing to do with His human life as such, His birth, His weaknesses and sufferings,

His death. Indeed, one form of Gnosticism, the Docetic, taught that the earthly body of Jesus was only an appearance—a phantasm, not a reality.

These notions, though not yet so elaborately formulated as afterward, were beginning to show themselves among the churches of Asia. How they affected the mind of the aged John we may learn from the first epistle, which he wrote expressly with a view to opposing them. 'The body of Jesus only an appearance,' do you say? He begins his letter by affirming: "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which our hands have handled of the word of life." "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. And this is that spirit of anti-Christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come: and even now already is it in the world." "This is He that came by water and blood." The sharpest statements, you see, of historical reality held up against the dreams of that new speculation. Thus the Epistle seems to have been written expressly in answer to those dangerous doctrines.

Now, some have asserted that the Gospel was written with this same purpose; but the assertion is made without sufficient reason. This most wonderful book lifts us far above the troubled regions of con-

troversy. It is not an argument, but a witness. Still, we may be better able, no doubt, to understand the evangelist's teachings, if we bear in mind these errors which were rising about him when he wrote.

But what was John's own purpose in writing? The churches possessed already, in threefold written form, that narrative of Christ's life which had been related by the apostles from the beginning—related by this John himself, together with the rest of the apostles. Why now, after so long a time, should John wish to put forward so different a history? Some have supposed that John wished from his own memory to correct and supplement the earlier Gospels, explaining more clearly the true order of events. But though the fourth Gospel does partially serve this purpose of explanation, we cannot well suppose this to have been John's own intention; for it would have been so easy for him to make such explanation and correction more effectually. As it is, we find it very difficult in many cases to say how his narrative can be brought into any connection with the others; so far from harmonizing them, it only raises new and greater difficulties.

No; it is much better to let the evangelist state his own purpose, which he has done in the clearest terms. "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might be-

lieve that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing, ye might have life through His name." There is the purpose. The simple facts of Christ's life and death and resurrection—such of them as it was needful to know—had long been known, and were already recorded in other Gospels. But the mere knowledge of those facts proved no longer able to sustain the faith of the Church. Whether we call it a progress or a retrogression, the Church had now gone beyond the unquestioning, childlike belief of her infancy. She was venturing out upon these unfathomable philosophical doctrines concerning the infinite and absolute; and concerning the logos, or Christ, if you wish to call it so, that emanation from the infinite which comes down into the finite world of time. The old simple statements of historical fact about Jesus offer insufficient standing-ground to men beset by such bewildering speculations. Such and such things, you say, happened to the historic Jesus; but we have now been swept into these profounder inquiries about the eternal Christ, the eternal Word. What care we for finite history?

But, thank God, there still remained in the world one living witness to that historic Jesus. And if the Church had been thinking strange, new thoughts, so had he. If the Church had found herself confronted by the deeper questions of eternal being, he also had been learning the deeper significance of that divine life

once lived in time. These had not been wasted years for him. Words heard so long before were only now unfolding their meaning in his mind. Through all these years, and in connection with all these new problems, the Spirit had been taking the things of Christ, and still revealing them to him, until, at last, this long silent disciple is about to speak; to speak now not as the companion of some readier apostle, merely giving his countenance to the other's story, but to tell now, at last, his own story; to declare those deepest truths concerning Jesus which his own peculiar love had been slowly revealing to him.

This shall not be a controversy with the Gnostics, and yet it is the best possible refutation of their errors, for it is a statement of that deeper truth which they, reaching after, had missed. The eternal Christ, the Word, the Son of God, they were seeking; and, therefore, they had turned away from that earthly Jesus who lived for a little while like other men, and then died. But here speaks one able to testify that that same historic Jesus is the Christ, the eternal Son of God.

The Gospel of John was written, as we believe, at Ephesus, between the years 80 and 100. He is familiar, and assumes his readers to be familiar, with such facts and teachings as are recorded in the earlier Gospels. Thus he reports the Baptist as saying: "This is He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me," etc. Spake

when? John himself makes no record of such a speech. Evidently he has in mind other well-known records like our Matthew or Mark. Or again, when he speaks of the dove at Christ's baptism, or calls Christ the son of Joseph, or alludes to His mother, or His going down to Capernaum, without further explanation; or to the Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment. In these and other places we can see how John takes it for granted that his readers knew the facts which all Christians knew, the facts reported in our other Gospels. Therefore he does not trouble himself to repeat those facts, except when they may bear upon his special purpose. He draws rather upon his own memory for such fresh material as he may put to best use in developing that deeper truth which he now wishes to declare.

Any discussion of the doctrine of the fourth Gospel would be aside from our present topic. I will merely call attention, in a word, to those features which most distinguish it from the other New Testament writings. He is to convince men, you remember, that Jesus is the Christ; and the Christ in that more philosophical sense which the term has now acquired among the Greek Christians of Asia; not only the expected Messiah of the Jews, but the eternal Logos. And so his Gospel begins, not with a table of genealogy, either from Abraham or from Adam; not with an account of the miraculous conception, or the birth at Bethle-

hem, or any other event of human history. But we read: "In the beginning was the logos, the Word; and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; .... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The most ambitious Gnostic must feel that this writer has searched as far as he into the regions of the infinite and eternal. We shall find the whole Gospel an unfolding of that one declaration that "the eternal Word was made flesh and dwelt among us": "the Word in whom was life, even the light of men."

Ah, but life, light, the eternal Word? and this, you say, is the same Jesus who was mocked and scourged and crucified? How can that be? The eternal light and the darkness of Calvary in one person? But listen further: "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. .... He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." And thus while our Gospel goes on to unfold that declaration that Jesus was the eternal Word made flesh, the eternal light shining upon earth; yet it must tell at the same time how the darkness intensifies itself against the light, and tries to quench it. The whole book is a development of that antagonism which grows fiercer and fiercer until the end.

You can see, if you compare John's Gospel with the others, that he has made no attempt to set down a full narrative of events. He chooses a few merely, a few miracles, a few discourses, such as will indicate

most clearly this awful tragedy, the growing hatred of the Jews for Christ. The light of Christ's own truth shines forth more clearly from chapter to chapter; but at the same time the darkness of their unbelief and murderous hate becomes clearer. "The world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not: He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Each successive chapter gives us a better understanding of those first sentences.

But parallel with this growing antagonism of the Jews, we see a growing fellowship between Christ and His own apostles: something of that Sonship which was His, being communicated to them; until at last He is able to speak to them on the night of His betrayal those marvellous words which we read in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters; where He even identifies us, His disciples, with Himself, as the living branches are one with the vine. But this side of His mission, also, was foreshadowed in the prologue, where we read, "His own," indeed, "received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God."

So, I think, if you examine the Gospel, you will see everywhere how skilfully the evangelist selects his material to prove and illustrate those three assertions of the prologue: 1st. That Jesus was the Word of God made flesh, the light of every man that cometh into the world. 2d. That the light shineth in dark-

ness, and the darkness comprehended it not; that He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. And 3d. That "to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God." Those truths become clearer to us with the teachings and events of each succeeding chapter; until on Calvary both the love of God and the wicked hate of man stand forever manifested; and then by the resurrection the love of God shows itself finally triumphant; the light, concealed for a moment, bursts forth to scatter the power of darkness forevermore.

No one of the four Gospels makes it a chief purpose to present an orderly narrative. They are all more concerned to offer nourishment to the Christian faith, than to satisfy our curiosity as to the earthly life of Jesus; consider their almost unbroken silence with reference to the first thirty years of that life! But this fourth Gospel seems written with even less historical intention than the others. Even more clearly than the others, John states, and adheres to, his purpose not to relate Christ's deeds and words indiscriminately, but only those which will enable us to believe.

And yet, even without historical intention, this fourth Gospel has furnished us much of our clearest historical knowledge concerning the life of Jesus. From the others we should have been likely to suppose that Christ's ministry lasted but a single year:

it is John who has informed us incidentally that the time was about three years. From the others we might have supposed that the leaders at Jerusalem had no personal acquaintance with Christ until that last visit; and we should have been puzzled to account for such bitter hatred developed in so short a time: it is John who informs us of the earlier visits at Jerusalem on occasion of the various feasts, and shows the deadly hatred growing. In fact, our knowledge of the real order of events in Christ's life is derived almost entirely from this fourth Gospel.

Moreover, this same Gospel furnishes us the largest number of those personal reminiscences which must come immediately from an eye-witness of the events. And, you remember, this is the only Gospel which does come thus immediately from an eye-witness. Luke gathers his material, as he may, from various sources: Peter's narrative, graphic as it is, reaches us only through the pen of Mark: Matthew's narrative, through the pen of his unknown Greek transcriber. John alone himself writes down for us in Greek his own story.

Accordingly, on almost every page these traces of personal reminiscence meet us. The aged writer is beholding once more those events of his youth; and many a trifling detail flashes upon his memory. Read the account of his own conversion in the first chapter, "for it was about the tenth hour," he says:

who cares what hour of the day it was when John first heard the voice of Jesus? Ah, but he cares: and that dearly cherished reminiscence slips from his pen unnoticed.

Or again, the discovery of the traitor at the last supper: the other accounts seemed almost unintelligible, as if Christ had first given the secret sign, that it was the man dipping his hand with Him in the dish; and then had publicly said to Judas, "It is thou." But in John's narrative, the whole scene stands revealed. The troubled words of Jesus: "One of you shall betray me"; the consternation and suspicion of the disciples; Peter's signal to John, who was reclining next to the Lord; John's whispered inquiry; Jesus' whispered answer: "It is he to whom I give the sop." And then He dipped it and gave it to Judas: and then seeing that Judas, though not the others generally, understood the significance of the act, He said to him: "That thou doest, do quickly." And the traitor at once went out, no one else knew why. Those other accounts came from men who had often heard the story told. This account comes from a man who himself saw and remembers. So we might mention many other instances.

And yet, as I said before, John's chief intention is not historical: and in some respects, no doubt, the earlier Gospels give a closer reproduction of words and events than he. There can be little doubt that

they reproduce more accurately Christ's characteristic manner of speaking. The languages are different, of course: he used the Aramaic, while they are all written in Greek. Still, there can be little doubt that the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded by Matthew and Luke, reproduces for us the characteristic tone and rhythm of Christ's own sentences more exactly than any chapter in John. For that peculiar style which appears everywhere in this fourth Gospel,—in the narrative, in the discourses of the Baptist and others, as well as in the discourses of Christ,—is plainly the style of John himself: and in some cases he even passes from the teachings of Christ to his own reflections about them, without marking the point of transition, as in the discourse with Nicodemus. This last fact need not at all disturb us; for it merely shows how completely the thought, and even the style of John himself had been formed after those teachings of Christ which had occupied his meditations for a lifetime. As Meyer has said: [John's] "very language must needs ever retain that inalienable stamp which he once involuntarily received from the heart and living word of Christ, and appropriated and preserved in all its depth and transparency in the profoundly spiritual laboratory of his own long, regenerate life."

Therefore if the others do show us most accurately the form of Christ's language, we must believe that John unfolds to us the most of its spirit. I have

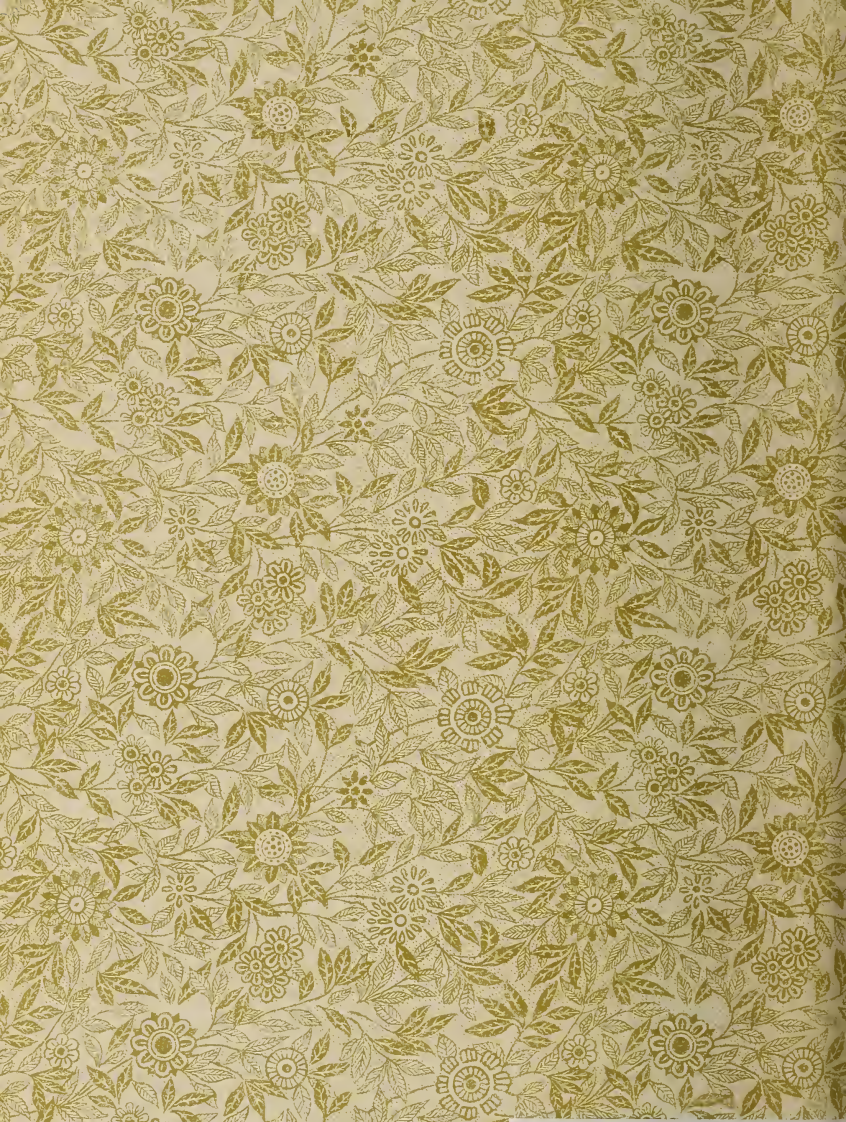
sometimes thought that the first three Gospels might be called photographs of the Christ, wonderfully accurate in external details; while the fourth Gospel is like a painting from the hand of a great master, where indeed the painter's personality disturbs somewhat the exactness of external representation; but on the other hand has brought out mysteriously, through the expression of that human face, the hidden nature of the Son of God.

There was one great philosopher among the Greeks, of such profound wisdom, and so pure a life, that his story has often been compared, even by reverent Christians, with the history of Jesus: and it is an interesting fact that Socrates also committed nothing to writing, and lives before the world through the testimony of his disciples; through the simple narrative of Xenophon's Memorabilia, and the profound philosophy of Plato's Dialogues: the one perpetuating for us the outer form, the other more of the inner spirit of the Master's words. The comparison must not be pressed; and yet it may help to show how the first three Gospels and the fourth are both needed to complete our knowledge of Jesus the Christ.

It has sometimes been said that Peter was peculiarly the apostle of the primitive church; Paul the apostle of the mediæval church and of the Reformers; John the apostle of our present age. The remark is as true as such generalizations usually are,—especially

true in this, that John's teachings must always be received as the final word of apostolic testimony. We would not spare the others. So long as there remains a church militant on earth, Paul especially will furnish the weapons of her warfare; but John lifts us nearer to the beatific vision, lifts us nearer to the church triumphant. And for any man, or any age, threatened, not by false religion, but by irreligion; not by Jewish legalism, or Romish superstition, but by doubt of all divine reality; this Gospel of John will always furnish the needed help—its testimonies the welcome foundation for a faith. For it offers no doubtful argument or wearisome controversy; but the direct vision of that light from above which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

And that vision of light once presented, must quickly pass judgment between all honest doubt and wicked unbelief: "for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."



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